O. Henry Memorial Award

PRIZE STORIES OF 1924

CHOSEN BY THE SOCIETY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD

PRIZE STORIES *of* 1924

CHOSEN BY THE SOCIETY OF
ARTS AND SCIENCES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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O. HENRY MEMORIAL
AWARD

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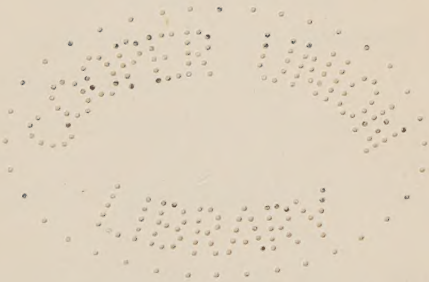

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INTRODUCTION

THIS volume results from a cumulative process of elimination and attrition. Six readers selected from American magazines of 1924 (January to November, inclusive) more than six hundred stories by American authors. Two readers, who are members of the annual committee of judges, chose the best third of these and submitted them to two other judges, whose ratings were recorded with those of the first two. Out of two hundred, thirty-six ranked highest in the opinions of these four judges. Three additional judges read these thirty-six. Twenty-four stories survived.

The following plan indicates the degrees and proportions of responsibility.

READERS	1. NIÑA JAY DUSENBERRY		JUDGES
	2. SHIRLEY V. LONG		
	3. EMMA K. TEMPLE		
	4. ISABEL WALKER		
	5. BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS	ANNUAL COMMITTEE	
	6. FRANCES GILCHRIST WOOD		
	7. EDWARD J. ERWIN		
	8. ROBERT L. RAMSAY		
	9. ELLIS PARKER BUTLER		
	10. ETHEL WATTS MUMFORD		
	11. ALLAN NEVINS		

Readers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
Annual Committee: 5, 6, 7, 8.
Judges: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

Ethel Watts Mumford and Blanche Colton Williams (Chairman) have served six years in judging stories and awarding prizes offered by the Society of Arts and Sciences. Frances Gilchrist Wood has served four years. Edward J. Erwin, instructor of short-story writing in Davidson College,

North Carolina; and Robert L. Ramsay, of the University of Missouri and editor of "Short Stories of America," were the new members on the annual committee. Ellis Parker Butler, author of "Pigs Is Pigs," retiring President of the Authors' League of America; and Allan Nevins, literary editor of the *Sun* (New York), were the remaining members of the committee of seven who adjudged the thirty-six stories.

At a meeting on November 25th, of a committee quorum, twenty-four stories were discussed as candidates for three prizes. Those present besides the Chairman were Ethel Watts Mumford, Frances Gilchrist Wood, Ellis Parker Butler, and Allan Nevins. The absent members, Edward J. Erwin and Robert L. Ramsay, telegraphed their preferences. The judges differed not only over the best of the few best stories but on the quality of brief fiction published in 1924. One expressed the fear that there were not enough stories to make a volume. Another commented that no peaks rise above the level—a level, however, admittedly high. The Chairman believes more good stories have appeared than in any year preceding.

Consideration of the candidates for the $100 prize, which is awarded to the best short short story, disclosed that four were in the running. "Fly Paper," by Mary Arbuckle; "The Uninvited," by Thomas Boyd; "Rachel and Her Children," by Frances Newman; and "The Man Who Loved Hate," by Wallace Smith. It was agreed that this last-named story bears strongest resemblance to O. Henry's tales; but—it should be repeated—this prize is not to perpetuate O. Henry's influence. O. Henry would be the first to approve that one who most honoured his technique by destroying it, if after the destruction the vandal built something better. The strong realism of "Fly Paper" was granted but with the regret that it falters toward the close. "The Uninvited" and "Rachel and Her Children" (both, as it happens, having been published in the *American Mercury*) remained. The merits of these were duly weighed, with the result that the committee unanimously voted the special prize to "Rachel and Her Children."

In its mental revolutions around a single incident, Miss Newman's narrative illustrates a growing reliance of present-day writers on the single point of view. The external incident

is a funeral, at which are numerous mourners. Narrowing the mourners to one, the author follows the reminiscences of an old mother—presumably overcome with grief under the heavy swathes of her English crêpe—who does not weep, for entertaining reasons, but at length bursts into tears, for reasons even more entertaining. A whole life is rounded through the moments of reflection of old Mrs. Overton whose mind the author, once having entered it, never leaves. It is a hard story, hard as a precious stone and as luminant. Since Miss Newman is the author of "The Short Story's Mutations," a work which bespeaks her interest in the development of the short story, it may be guessed that this gem is no accident. She knew the particular technique she was employing, was cognizant of its advantages—as Henry James would have been cognizant.

Over the first prize there was more debate. "White Apes," by Fannie Hurst, headed two lists. But four judges held that since the story was published in two parts, it falls outside the limitations imposed on this committee who consider only one-part stories. Its employment of heredity, its application of the Freudian theory, its vigour, the Greek quality of its tragedy, the vivid style by which these are conveyed—all contribute to one of the best tales Miss Hurst has written. "White Apes" is superior, even, to "Humoresque" (reprinted in the first volume of this series), which in its motion-picture version became popular throughout the earth.

"What Do You Mean—Americans?" held first place on one list but was voted out inasmuch as Mr. Steele has received two prizes from the Society of Arts and Sciences. Oddly enough the judge who preferred it remarked that having been recently to Cape Cod he found the story a perfect reflection of the life he saw there, while the judge who gave it the lowest rating—a Steele fan and friend, at that—averred that having been many times on Cape Cod she found it not at all adequate.

"A Different Country," by Josephine Daskam Bacon, stood first on another list. But most of the committee, though admitting its charm, felt it to be another in the long chain of tales that began with "The Brushwood Boy" and reached the stage last season in "Outward Bound."

"The Spring Flight," by Inez Haynes Irwin; "Margaret Blake," by Chester T. Crowell; "The Most Dangerous Game," by Richard Connell; "The Courier of the Czar," by Elsie Singmaster; and "Uriah's Son," by Stephen Vincent Benet—held high place on all lists. "The Spring Flight" had first place on the lists of two judges, second place on another, and ranked among the three highest on a third list. One judge argued tentatively that an episode in the life of Shakespeare is opposed to the spirit of the American short story, to which another replied that it is so much more than an episode and that any subject is subject for the American writer. Perhaps, too, the use of historical material is largely a matter of fashion. Another of the committee thought the story over-long for the content, the author having too generously endowed it with details of fact or apparent fact. Perhaps there may be too many men in the tavern scene; but, as the writer saw it, they were all men who helped to make Shakespeare what he was; every one of them helped to make the mood in which he found himself. Someone advanced that what the reader brings to a story of Shakespeare gives it apparent greatness. To which the obvious answer was that any story gains—or loses—by what the reader brings; he may bring so much, conceivably, as to throw most tales about the Man of Avon into the discard, whereas this particular one richly satisfies the reader's demands. Not in Warwickshire had the weary writer been able to set in motion his "diamond sharp creative wheels"; to London he rode. Not at Montjoy's, hearing much of plays and players from his garrulous hostess; not at the Mermaid, among his familiars; not at John Harvard's home. But in the theatre—whither, after he confessed himself beaten, his feet bore him—he heard from a carpenter the small narrative which set those creative wheels turning. Whoever reads the story will feel the discouragement, prolonged sense of struggle to crystallize the drama in solution, the despair—"The game was up"—and will know when the ex-sailor tells of his voyage with Sir George Summers that the crystallizing agent has been found. Who reads will feel, too, Mrs. Irwin's insight into the great dramatist's soul—who can analyze and dramatize better than a writer the struggle of a writer? Further, after the slowly moving action so harmonious with the deadlock of the mind, the reader with a

leap of the pulses will rush through the final words that tell not only of Shakspere's winning the game but flash the thousands of performances of the most beautiful play belonging to his latter days—a play argent bright in the dust of centuries.

Finally, only one dissenting voice urged "The Most Dangerous Game"; the judge who had cast his vote for Mr. Steele's story joined those favouring "The Spring Flight." Having the largest number of votes, therefore, "The Spring Flight" was awarded the first prize, $500.

All the remaining stories considered for first prize were considered in awarding the second prize. "Uriah's Son" was praised for its sentiment and delicately firm treament of an original situation. One judge, however, could not accept as basically possible this situation in spite of the skill expended by the author to make it convincing. Another believed that Frances Jerome was a trifle stupid throughout the years not to see what the reader sees in the first episode whereby David Davenant tests the courage of his stepson. The author had to steer his craft through narrow straits. He must let the reader see—otherwise the end would not be credible—and he must prevent, apparently, the stepson's understanding what his stepfather had been about. A difficult feat and of necessity attended by incomplete success. But it is a noble effort.

"The Most Dangerous Game," by the author of the second-prize story of 1923, is distinctive among the year's horror stories. One judge wrote of it: "Impossible situation, of course, but most interesting to the last word." Another recalled that it absorbed 100 per cent. of his attention, provoked him to sit erect and hold his breath while awaiting the outcome of the struggle to the death between the champion hunters, Rainsford and General Zaroff. In its final phases the struggle is over-condensed, but the ultimate thrill more than compensates. Poe would have envied the author this tale.

"The Courier of the Czar," by Elsie Singmaster, will be recognized as one of the Shindledecker sisters series by *Saturday Evening Post* readers, most of whom will agree with the committee in thinking it the best of those centring about the two Pennsylvania German women. No writer of recent

years has exemplified more touchingly, more humorously, the gnawing of mental hunger and the satisfying of that hunger. The Bible, the Book of Martyrs, and the Almanac, Tilly and Betsey knew by heart. Some extraordinary motive must lead to their sin of reading a worldly book. What wonder that after the fifty-eighth quilt Tilly's sight was endangered—and her mind? Nothing less tragic would have impelled Betsey to the sin, which later she had to confess. Easily, simply, the author permits Betsey's concern over her sin to give away the part of the story she has read, with the result that the whole congregation hangs in suspense over the fate of "The Courier of the K-zar" and treks to the Shindledecker cottage. You smile when Betsey complacently announces she will begin once again in the beginning—a smile that forges past a lump in your throat. The simplicity of these Mennonite folk brings before you the genre paintings of Teniers and Van Eyck. At the same time you stand convicted, "And yet it is part of America."

Condensed novel, rather than short story, "Margaret Blake" achieves its effect within short-story limits. With the judges, every reader will approve its freshness and spontaneity. On a subject too frequently associated with the unwholesome and salacious, its sanity and wholesomeness alone raise it above the ordinary. Its clever reversal of the usual situation is so cunningly managed as to hide in a seemingly natural series of events all traces of cleverness. Margaret Blake's strength lay in her lack of self-consciousness. She had no education, but "was incapable of envy, malice, or revenge. . . . She practised something akin to polyandry in a strictly orthodox, puritanical community for more than a decade, named three illegitimate sons after their fathers, wrecked all three of the fathers, flourished as probably no green bay tree ever dreamed of flourishing, and finally in her mature years chased those who wanted to tell the truth about her to evasion, silence, or actual falsehood." At last, she gave her life in the attempt to save that of another, and thereby made the community safe in public confession of that love all had felt for her and which had tortured them in the years when they felt compelled to hate her.

"What a masterpiece of economy!" exclaimed one judge. "Original, simple, direct," said another. A beautiful piece of

work, beautifully made, beautifully thought out, "Margaret Blake" was unanimously awarded the second prize—$250.

Of the remaining stories, Raymond S. Spears's "A River Combine—Professional" ranks among the first for its interpretation of the river spirit, for poetry half revealed through dialect, the *élan* of life when life is young. To read it is to watch through Prenaux's violin the motion of geese and cranes flying through the blue sky, wings flashing in the sunshine, to see May Gardner translating that motion in the dance, flying down the stage "like great white swans fly down the line travelling out of the north, white, strong, shimmering. Lawse! Lawse!" To hear "Caving Bends" is to hear the water "suckling an' sawing—an' then lumping-lumping down as the ground falls in, a tree swings out and falls a splashing." Here are the apotheosis of river sound and motion, an idyllic love story and a struggle that ends right.

The *Forum* offered, in 1924, a prize of $1,000 for the best story submitted in the first six months of the year. The contest closed on July first, with an entry of nearly six hundred stories. Out of these six hundred the best were passed on to a committee which unanimously selected "The Secret at the Crossroads," by Jefferson Mosley, as most worthy of the award. The committee from the Society of Arts and Sciences are glad to add their appreciation of its strength. In the first place, it is a story—no mere sketch or mood. It presents through the climactic events of a single evening the heroic struggle Doctor Agard made for his black brothers among a people suspicious of them, of whom they were suspicious. Perhaps the locale is purposefully veiled; but mosquitoes, swamps, rail-fenced corn, and cotton clearing are of the South, whatever the particular section. The epic is one that could be adventured nowhere else; only this region affords the conditions. One judge suggests that the ending loses by the introduction of the name of Lincoln, but most readers will hear in the name the whip crack which snaps out the significance of what has gone before.

In connection with this prize story, *Harper's* contests demand a word. The editors offered, in 1924, $10,000 in prizes. For the best story submitted before March 31, $1,250; for the second best, $750; for the third best, $500. Similar prizes were offered in contests closing June 30th, September

30th, and December 31st. The committee from the Society of Arts and Sciences have read with peculiar interest the winning stories which have been published and have found —as may be seen by reference to the lists below—Fleta Campbell Springer's "Legend" among the best thirty-six of the year.

"The Tie That Binds," by George Pattullo ("The Metrolopus by Moonlight" Ethel Watts Mumford joyously suggests for sub-title) the committee liked for its humour and management of group psychology. Anchored in the Grecian port, Young America uses its fists three times on an evening ashore, then rows back to the boat and sleeps—after carefully removing automatics and stowing them under pillows. In 4,000 words this sunburst of merriment epitomizes, to the reader's chuckles, the preferred way of declaring oneself patriotic. And it offers other causes for smiles. One judge recommended that this account of America in a foreign country be placed, for the gain in contrast, alongside the drama of Greeks and Portuguese and Russians on Cape Cod. "What Do You Mean—Americans?" by the way, will meet approval for being not so much a lesson in patriotism as an instance of "The King Is Dead! Long Live the King!" With sympathy for the last of the old-timers on the Cape, Mr. Steele welcomes the foreigners who also speedily become Americans. The emergence of his idea compels admiration. The story takes shape as a statue hewn out of granite; at first but dimly owning the likeness of a human being, it grows in counterfeit, and stands revealed at length a particular portrait only when the final touches are bestowed. Or, rather as a ship sails in through harbour mist, vaguely, then more clearly, and with the lifting of the mist appears as herself and no other, so in the last words the story becomes succinct and wholly rounded.

The challenge of "Progress," by Harriet Welles, is so individual as to have drawn these opposing comments. Number One: "Unreal, affected." Number Two: "Seems to me the best of the entire lot." For the one, theme is too dominant and too artificially conveyed through the story medium. For the other, theme develops logically with the successive epochs of progress that mark Jem Brown's life. Perhaps, too, in the rush of to-day he agrees with Jem that progress is

"inventin' somethin' to carry you over the country so fast you can't see nothin' you're a passin'." The dénouement binds together tightly the preceding threads: Camel train wound into the settlement—and his mother was gone; locomotives thundered upon their scheduled way—and soon Jenny's place knew her no more; in the airplane Jem sees his own signal for departure. That signal gives the reader a moment of startled wonder over the future—"What next?" The wife of Admiral Welles knows and loves most of the earth—except possibly the sea, the desert best of all. Skilfully she has introduced the history of camels in America and made them subservient to her purpose. Her passage from "The Seven Lamps of Architecture" recalls her "According to Ruskin," which at last accounts had been translated into the twenty-fifth foreign tongue.

"Old men stories go so far and no farther," one judge commented on reading "Horse and Horse." Perhaps that very comment implies a sincerity to life, a faithfulness to character. Hank is a Western Ulysses who cannot rest from travel; he is strong to strive, to seek, and—having yielded once to temptation that proved his undoing—not to yield again. Some of the judges enjoy the neat architecture of this narrative. Unobtrusive clues—connections between ground plan and superstructure; building and balancing of character—stone on stone making for height and symmetry; the final emotional thrust—which is the topmost tower; these satisfy the demand that a story be put together featly, for strength and whatever of beauty the design permits. And the light in the house is that honour and pride scorn the taking of a secret advantage. Charles Caldwell Dobie is a master of the art by which one tells a story or paints pictures with words. A resident of San Francisco and member of the Bohemian Club, he knows the alkali desert and the trout brooks, which he has unobtrusively, perhaps symbolically, employed in this Odyssey.

"'Lijah" will recall to readers of the 1923 volume Edgar Valentine Smith, who was awarded the first prize for "Prelude." One judge said of "'Lijah," "A darling story—not so well done." Another commented upon the resemblance of Judge Holmsted to Colonel Carter of Cartersville. But, remarked another, who had lived four years on the Tombigbee, "What are you to do about it if those old aristocrats

are pretty much alike? His creation of 'Lijah sets the Judge apart from his class, as the embellishment of 'Lijah distinguishes 'Bama." The mica deposit—so fortuitously found—worried another; but, again, mica is just what that farm land would yield. One of the committee admitted to particular pleasure in the requirements of the closing lines. Than Mr. Smith no Southern writer of to-day is more familiar with his people or more adequately expresses through his stories those characteristics which are the soul of the old South.

By a miss that is better than a mile, "Professor Boynton Rereads History," by Edith Mirrielees, just escapes being an essay. For the narrow dividing line that separates the purpose of the essay from the entertainment of the story disappears. The essay, in effect, is conveyed by the story vehicle. One critic may affirm that the professor's rereading of the familiar passage is unnecessary to the point; but another will be ready to argue that Miss Mirrielees could take no chances. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle never leaves his Sherlockian exploits to possible apprehension of the Doctor Watson order of intellect, so this author doubtless thought it best to emphasize her point. The Doctor Watsons are those she wished to impress, needed to impress. The final division of the story may be, then, superfluous to one reader; to ninety-nine others it will be essential. If there is more truth than fiction in this eye-opener, it was high time somebody was exploiting that truth under the guise of the garment in which fact popularly masquerades.

"One Uses the Handkerchief," by Elinore Cowan Stone, met with general favour. It is further testimony to Miss Stone's understanding of the heart of childhood and to her keen sense of humour, her sympathy, and her ability to extract the smiles and sobs from an everyday situation, which the committee first noticed with pleasure in "What Do We Wear?" (*Century*, September, 1922). Humour, stalked by its attendant shade, appears in Raphael who, by serving as monitor of the handkerchiefs, learned in his humble way to be "the good American." A touch of genius endears that semi-naked youngster of the scuffed shoes as a heroic figure worthy the gold watch fob presented by the Big Boss.

While they were considering the virtues of Raphael the committee observed that a large proportion of American stor-

ies—American in setting, in feeling, and in tone, as in the required authorship—had fallen among those adjudged best. Mexico-American, Mennonite, Cape Cod old-timer and Cape Cod new citizen, gobs in Greece, Professor in West Brookins, Margaret Blake, American sportsman, David Davenant—business man, Southern doctor, Mississippi River professionals, Southern aristocrat, old lady Daughter of the Revolution and Daughter of the Confederacy—all are varieties of the genus Americanus. Only the first prize story is wholly outside the American scene. And even there, not to press the matter too far, one links the Harvard home with New England, shuttles between the memorial room in St. Saviour's and a certain statue in the grounds of Harvard University.

This continuity of scene and character is quite accidental and proves nothing, though it happens to differentiate this volume from its predecessors. If any conclusion is to be drawn it is that this group of judges appreciates the art that prompts our story writers to find fictional worth in what is near at hand.

Robert L. Ramsay says he was most impressed by "the increasing number of symbolistic short stories, stories with a touch or more than a touch of mysticism. Many of these, such as Roy Dickinson's 'The Ultimate Frog' and Fleta Campbell Springer's 'Legend' are imperfect in execution and uncertain of aim, but there is in them an originality and sincerity missing in most stories that follow older grooves." Frances Gilchrist Wood and the Chairman rate "The Ultimate Frog" among the best stories of the year. The Chairman recommended it to the editor of *Current Opinion* and understands that he, too, charmed by its unusual character, chose it for reprinting.

Mr. Ramsay also notes the brave persistence of the local-colour story—such as "The River Combine" and Paul Green's "The Devil's Instrument"—in spite of the fact that certain critics have sounded its death knell. He comments on the apparent recrudescence of the historical story and "the curious epidemic of kid stories." He also finds promise among the new writers—particularly in May Freud Dickenson, Meigs Frost, and Margaret Culkin Banning.

The following list is of stories that ranked highest with the annual committee. Those starred totalled a somewhat higher

number of points and were therefore the thirty-six submitted to the three additional judges:

Allen, James Lane, The Violet (*Harper's*, June).
Anderson, Sherwood, Caught (*American Mercury*, February).
Arbuckle, Mary, *Fly Paper (*Real Life*, April); Mirage (*Midland*, September).
Bacon, Josephine Daskam, *A Different Country (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 7).
Banning, Margaret Culkin, A Great Club Woman (*Harper's*, November).
Barker, Elsa, A Ticket to Brooklyn (*Harper's*, February).
Bechdolt, Frederick R., Brazos (*Cosmopolitan*, August).
Beer, Thomas, Sophistication (*Saturday Evening Post*, October 11).
Benet, Stephen Vincent, *Uriah's Son (*Red Book*, May).
Boogher, Susan Meriwether, *Fear (*Saturday Evening Post*, February 23).
Boyd, Thomas, *The Uninvited (*American Mercury*, November.)
Brady, Mariel, *The Autograph Album (*Good Housekeeping*, October).
Brinig, Myron, *The Synagogue (*Munsey's*, March).
Burt, Katharine Newlin, Triggerfinger (*Cosmopolitan*, June).
Burt, Struthers, Pepper's Ghost (*Red Book*, June).
Butler, Ellis Parker, Finding Mr. Wing (*Delineator*, February).
Caruthers, William, *What Killed Brush Flat (*Collier's*, May 31).
Clark, Valma, Crumbs (*Holland's*, June); Service (*Scribner's*, October).
Cobb, Irvin S., *A Crown Prince in Banishment (*Cosmopolitan*, June).
Connell, Richard, *The Most Dangerous Game (*Collier's*, January, 19); Pieces of Silver (*Century*, September).
Cooper, Courtney Ryley, Voices of the Sea (*Red Book*, February).
Crawford, Charlotte Holmes, The Point of Recoil (*Scribner's*, October).
Crowell, Chester T., *Margaret Blake (*Century*, February); The Four Smith Girls (*Pictorial Review*, September).

Davis, Aaron, The Polka-Dot Hounds (*Saturday Evening Post*, October 25).
Derieux, Samuel, Wild Bill McCorkle (*American*, August).
Dickenson, May Freud, *The Mouse (*American Mercury*, July).
Dickinson, Roy, The Ultimate Frog (*Harper's*, November).
Dobie, Charles Caldwell, The Cracked Teapot (*Harper's*, January); *Horse and Horse (*Harper's*, July).
Ferber, Edna, Our Very Best People (*Cosmopolitan*, March); *Holiday (*Cosmopolitan*, June).
Fitzgerald, F. Scott, Diamond Dick (*Hearst's International*, April); John Jackson's Arcady (*Saturday Evening Post*, July 26).
Frost, Meigs O., *The Challenge of the Snake (*Short Stories*, February 25); The Mirror of Courage (*Collier's*, June 28).
Gaither, Rice, The Phantom Taxi (*McCall's*, January).
Glenn, Isa Urquhart, The Shuttle (*Scribner's*, January).
Green, Paul, *The Devil's Instrument (*Atlantic Monthly*, July).
Hart, Frances Noyes, The Happy Ending (*McCall's*, October).
Hopper, James, Father and Son (*Saturday Evening Post*, October 25).
Howard, Sidney, *A Likeness of Elizabeth (*McCall's*, November).
Hurst, Fannie, *White Apes (*Forum*, March–April).
Irwin, Inez Haynes, *The Spring Flight (*McCall's*, June).
Jackson, Charles Tenney, For His Tribe (*Popular*, April 20).
Kelland, Clarence Budington, The Gate in the Wall (*Saturday Evening Post*, July 5).
Lane, Rose Wilder, Autumn (*Harper's*, June).
Lea, Fannie Heaslip, It Was Not Love (*McCall's*, June).
Macauley, Ward, Smilson (*Scribner's*, January).
Mason, Grace Sartwell, The Closed House (*Red Book*, April).
Miller, Helen Topping, *The Far Side of Thunderbolt (*Pictorial Review*, March).
Mirrielees, Edith R., *Professor Boynton Rereads History (*Atlantic Monthly*, August).
Morris, Gouverneur, The Mouse Woman (*Cosmopolitan*, July).

Mosley, Jefferson, *The Secret at the Crossroads (*Forum*, November).
Mumford, Ethel Watts, Mine (*Everybody's*, February).
Newman, Frances, *Rachel and Her Children (*American Mercury*, May).
Parker, Dorothy, Mr. Durant (*American Mercury*, September).
Pattullo, George, *The Tie That Binds (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 28).
Pratt, Lucy, The Dark Gate (*Good Housekeeping*, October).
Rinehart, Mary Roberts, The Altar on the Hill (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 14).
Roe, Vingie E., Vengeance Is Mine (*McCall's*, October).
Singmaster, Elsie, *The Courier of the Czar (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 7).
Smith, Edgar Valentine, Silhouette (*Harper's*, May); *'Lijah (*Harper's*, August).
Smith, Wallace, *The Man Who Loved Hate (*Collier's*, September 27).
Spears, Raymond S., *A River Combine—Professional (*Argosy-Allstory*, May 3).
Springer, Fleta Campbell, *Tragedienne (*Harper's*, March); *Legend (*Harper's*, November).
Steele, Wilbur Daniel, *What Do You Mean—Americans? (*Pictorial Review*, April); Lost at Sea (*Pictorial Review*, May).
Stone, Elinore Cowan, *One Uses the Handkerchief (*Woman's Home Companion*, November).
Stringer, Arthur, The Cat (*Cosmopolitan*, November).
Suckow, Ruth, A Start in Life (*American Mercury*, September).
Tarkington, Booth, My Heart (*Ladies' Home Journal*, October).
Tarleau, Ysaye, Loutré (*Harper's*, September).
Terhune, Albert Payson, Have You Seen Him? (*Saturday Evening Post*, September 13).
Van de Water, Frederic F., *Yellow Cargo (*Saturday Evening Post*, April 26).
Warren, Hamilton, The Faithful Image (*Scribner's*, July).
Welles, Harriet, *Progress (*Scribner's*, June).
Whitman, Stephen French, Cretheus and the Lions (*American Mercury*, March).

Williams, Ben Ames, *The Wine of Violence (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May); His Own Petard (*Collier's*, September 20); A Finished Story (*Good Housekeeping*, October).
Williams, Jesse Lynch, The Actress and the Lady (*Cosmopolitan*, October).
Wood, Charles W., *Spook (*Collier's*, March 1).

The following list is of stories that rank next in merit with a majority of the annual committee.

Alexander, Elizabeth, Tyrant—Woman (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 28); Ties (*Saturday Evening Post*, September 13).
Andrews, Clarence Edward, Love in the Flea Market (*Atlantic Monthly*, June).
Bailey, Ledyard M., The Horse That Broke the Town (*People's Home Journal*, August).
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Glenn, Isa Urquhart, The Coffee-Cooler (*Scribner's*, November).

Hall, Holworthy, Commencement (*Saturday Evening Post*, March 29).

Hull, Helen R., The Playboy (*Cosmopolitan*, April).

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Kirk, R. G., Nemesis at Number Five (*Collier's*, September 13).

Kniffin, Harry A., The Name Forbidden (*Delineator*, April); Patchwork (*Delineator*, July).

Larsson, Genevieve, Ingeborg the Proud (*Pictorial Review*, June).

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Mellett, Berthe K., The Bacchae (*Ainslee's*, March).

Morris, Gouverneur, Lady Bluebeard (*Cosmopolitan*, August); A Postscript to Divorce (*Hearst's International*, September).

Mumford, Ethel Watts, Everything Money Can Buy (*Hearst's International*, August); The Hat (*Ainslee's*, August).

Mygatt, Gerald, That's Human, Too! (*Metropolitan*, January).
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Peyton, Mary Wetzell, Passage Money Home (*American*, April).
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Roche, Arthur Somers, The Kiss of Papa Joffre (*Cosmopolitan*, May).
Rossiter, William Sidney, Two Ivory Cupids (*Atlantic Monthly*, September).
Royer, Lucy March, The Doubtful Inheritance (*McCall's*, January).
Rutledge, Maryse, An Old Man's Fiddle (*Collier's*, June 14).
Saxby, Charles, After Eden (*Delineator*, March).
Scoggins, C. E., The Cherub (*Woman's Home Companion*, May).
Sholl, Anna McClure, Pennyroyal (*Woman's Home Companion*, November).
Singmaster, Elsie, A Man in the House (*Saturday Evening Post*, February 9); His Wife's Money (*Metropolitan*, June).
Steele, Wilbur Daniel, Marriage (*Pictorial Review*, August.)
Storrs, Marguerite Lusk, Doc Queer (*McCall's*, April).
Street, Julian, A Speaking Likeness (*Saturday Evening Post*, August 9).
Synon, Mary, Mrs. Hartigan (*Good Housekeeping*, July).
Tarkington, Booth, The Power of the Press (*McCall's*, January).
Terhune, Albert Payson, The Last Adventure (*Good Housekeeping*, August).
Terrill, Lucy Stone, That Broader Outlook (*Saturday Evening Post*, September 27).
Train, Arthur, The Lost Gospel (*Saturday Evening Post*, June 7).
Van Doren, Carl, The Shadow of a Triangle (*Century*, October).
Van Vorst, Marie, The Witch of Top-Hell (*Pictorial Review*, September).

Walshe, Douglas, The Custom of the Country (*McClure's*, April).
Weiman, Rita, Matinee Idle (*Saturday Evening Post*, August 2).
Wharton, Edith, The Spark (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May).
Whitman, Stephen French, The Ladies of Boccaccio (*Everybody's*, February).
Williams, Ben Ames, Perfectly Absurd (*Ladies' Home Journal*, February); Northeaster (*Saturday Evening Post*, September 20).
Williams, Jesse Lynch, The Lovely Lady (*Saturday Evening Post*, April 19).
Williams, Margery, The White Flower (*Everybody's*, November).
Wister, Owen, Sun Road (*Cosmopolitan*, July).

The following summary indicates the year of serial publication, the titles of the stories, the authors, and the prizes awarded by the Society of Arts and Sciences:

1919. 1. England to America, by Margaret Prescott Montague. $500.
2. "For They Know Not What They Do," by Wilbur Daniel Steele. $250.

1920. 1. Each in His Generation, by Maxwell Struthers Burt. $500.
2. "Contact!" by Frances Noyes Hart. $250.

1921. 1. The Heart of Little Shikara, by Edison Marshall, $500.
2. The Man Who Cursed the Lilies, by Charles Tenney Jackson. $250.
3. Special prize to Wilbur Daniel Steele for the best work of 1919, 1920, and 1921. $500.

1922. 1. Snake Doctor, by Irvin S. Cobb. $500.
2. Innocence, by Rose Wilder Lane. $250.
3. Gold-Mounted Guns, by F. R. Buckley. $100.

1923. 1. Prelude, by Edgar Valentine Smith. $500.
2. A Friend of Napoleon, by Richard Connell. $250.

3. Towers of Fame, by Elizabeth Irons Folsom. $100.

1924. 1. The Spring Flight, by Inez Haynes Irwin. $500.
2. Margaret Blake, by Chester T. Crowell. $250.
3. Rachel and Her Children, by Frances Newman. $100.

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But for the coöperation of editors and authors, however, this annual volume would be impossible; the present committee thank both for their prompt and cordial assistance. Since the expense incurred in buying magazines is one of the most considerable met by the committee, the chairman would thank particularly those editors who, unsolicited, have sent their publications free of charge.

BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS.

New York City,
December 19, 1924.

O. HENRY MEMORIAL
AWARD

PRIZE STORIES
of 1924

THE SPRING FLIGHT

By INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

From *McCall's*

THE first chilling shadows of the April dusk had settled over London when Shakspere drew rein in front of the wigmaker's. The day had been untimely hot. His horse was in a lather and he too was dusty and tired; fretted. The city smells caught him; and in that mood he was prepared to dub Silver and Muggle the foulest corner in London. For a moment, nobody within seemed to take note of his arrival and then a sudden babble burst. "'Tis Will, husband! 'Tis Will Shakspere!" he caught the characteristic tinkle of Mistress Montjoy's voice, turned shrill with delight. In an instant both the Montjoys were hurrying through the doorway on to the cobbles; Mistress Montjoy, an azure dart, swift and sure and smooth as a swan; the long side-ruffles of her white muslin overdress shearing the air, her iron-gray curls maintaining their perfect alignment. Montjoy himself, big-nosed, mottle-faced, dull-eyed, the puce of his suit the exact shade of his hard cheeks, not a hair of his glossy brown wig disturbed, moved more slowly from force of weight, bulk, or perhaps from his instinctive dislike of Shakspere. Behind, the doorway filled for an instant with crop-headed 'prentice lads, gaping; then emptied precipitately as Montjoy threw his heavy glance back on them. But by this time, Mistress Montjoy had Shakspere's hand; had smacked him heartily.

"Well, well, lad!" she exclaimed. "Welcome and plenty! We did not expect thee for a month yet. How camest thou to London so early?"

Shakspere shook hands with his host. He laughed, but not mirthfully. "Upon my word, mistress, of that you know as much as I. A whim! An impulse! I work not well these days. I've worked not well for months. There's a

strange slowness to my mind. And then of a sudden, Stratford sounded dead and London smelled fresh. Is my chamber vacant, mistress? I can go a dozen places else."

"'Tis vacant and aching for thee, Will," Mistress Montjoy asserted. "But why stand we here for all London to jibe at? Come ye in, lad!"

Montjoy unstrapped the saddle bags, handed them to a boy whom he summoned by another heavy glance, and led the horse away. Shakspere followed his hostess into the house. A half-dozen apprentices, sorting or stringing hair, were making, now that the master had disappeared, but a pretense of work. They gaped; cast slant glances. At one side, a trio of Montjoy's master assistants, their weaving-needles stuck in wigs fitted to featureless, head-shaped blocks on the long table, idled openly. A girl's face, set with two stark, blue O's of eye and one wondering soft red O of mouth, peered through a door.

"A jug of water, Nan!" Mistress Montjoy called shrilly after her. "And fresh face linen, Joan, for the guest chamber! Ink, a quill, and paper! Candles! Hurry, wenches! Fetch the saddle bags, Con!"

Close on her words came clatter and clash from the kitchen. Mistress Montjoy ran nimbly up the stairs and Shakspere followed close on the heels which flittered like stripes of red out of the azure petticoat. They entered a wide, low-ceiled room at the back of the house. Talking volubly, Mistress Montjoy threw open the casements of the two windows. Coolness, alternately staled by the stenches from the city streets and freshened by odours from Mistress Montjoy's early-blooming garden, flowed into the unaired languor of the room. Came also the twilight sounds: the near shouts of children at play—boys at ball, little girls singing, "London Bridge Is Falling Down"; the far, faint cry of the apprentices on Cheapside, "What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack?" The flood of the silvery-umber twilight, stained scarlet from the sunset, oozed into the room, filmed the fine polish of the floor as with a visible wetness. A low, wide bed, a broad, use-blackened table, two stools, a carved chest, made black hulks in this rose-argent sea. Shakspere stood in the centre of the room, a little dazed, staring about him. He was conscious alternately of a sense of fatigue . . . relief . . . re-

lease . . . fatigue . . . something like peace . . . fatigue. . . .

"Thou'rt tired, lad," Mistress Montjoy commented, compassionately. "Yet how comest thou worn with that sun-blackened face? Thine eyes are lacklustre too."

It was true that though country tan had turned his olive colouring almost black, Shakspere's eyes were hollow. The faint luminosity that lay in their hazel depths seemed to come, not from within, but from without—as though the force back of them had died down, leaving them to reflect mere light. Nevertheless, his moustached lips were firm and full; and they produced a smile whose quick glint gave to his face all the candid pleasantness which had distinguished its old-time mirth. The flash of smile lasted but an instant. The look which was normal to him—of a quiet, a reserve almost enigmatic, and touched now with weariness—blanketed it completely.

Mechanically Shakspere sat down; extended his feet for the boy to pull off his boots. Mechanically he watched Mistress Montjoy rummage in his saddle bags until she found his shoes; as mechanically he watched the boy draw them on. "Tired!" he repeated. "Tired. Aye. My body's tired. I've ridden four days. But that's not the whole tale. My mind's tired. In truth, I'm staled by country life and country folk and country thought. The quiet . . . the damned, dead, dull quiet. . . . And maybe by age . . . I know not." He laughed out again, mirthlessly. "By Lady, thou'll not believe it, mistress, but I, Will Shakspere, the industrious apprentice—'tis weeks since I have writ a line. Hours I've sat, my head in my hands, my brain stewing, festering. Then five days agone, on to my horse I leaped; turned his nose Londonward—and here am I. How I came, or by what roads, or what degrees, I know not. One night at Oxford at St. George's Inn comes clear; beside that naught but long days of dust and rain."

Mistress Montjoy's brisk glance played a gleam of blue obliqueness upon him. "And Mistress Davenant," she asked in even tones, "how goes it with her? And thy god-child?" She removed his cape; took his hat from his unresisting fingers.

"Well, well; both well," Shakspere answered. His tone

was absent. And when the two maids entered—Nan, blue-eyed and flaxen-curled with the full hips of the country; Joan, dark and waxy, shapely too, though only a slim bit of cockney flesh—he considered their movements but absently. Nan placed candles on the table; took Shakspere's cape and hat; disappeared. Joan put a pewter ewer and basin on the stand, wiped up a slop of water; disappeared. Nan returned with a slender sheaf of paper, a pewter inkstand, a quill; Joan with linen. All the time, Shakspere was answering Mistress Montjoy's inquiries about his family.

Yes, Anne was well. And Sukey and Judy were well. Joan was well. And her three boys, Will and Tom and Michael, were well. Sukey's little Betty—for the first time Shakspere's jaded face gleamed brilliantly as he talked of his only granddaughter—bloomed fairly. Yes, Betty was a great girl for her age, a gay, winsome, lovesome child, the pet of the family. Outwardly, Mistress Montjoy seemed to take no note of the perfunctory quality in Shakspere's answers. But she finally interrupted the flow of her own interrogations with orders to the two maids for supper: "Fish to be fried . . . a meat pie . . . a gooseberry tart, Joan. And plenty of ale, Nan . . . and cakes. . . . Now hurry, wenches!" And on the instant of their departure —had Will heard of the new theatre, the Hope? The town was full of the talk of it. It was to be an addition to the Paris Gardens. Henslowe and Meade—surely Will remembered Meade, the great roaring, hairy bear of a waterman!—were building it. There would also be a new inn built in the Gardens, The Dancing Bears, and there Meade would live. It was to be the finest theatre in London, so they said. . . . Yes, for plays. Oh, and, of course, for bear- and bull-baiting too. They were a shrewd pair, those two! Had he heard they were opening the old Swan? And indeed London was play mad. Surely Shakspere knew that the unreputable country parson, Daborne, whom astute old Henslowe had rescued from a debtors' prison, was going to have a company of acting children. Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* had proved a poor thing. And for her own part, she considered that Fletcher would never hit the public taste alone. But with Beaumont—— It was true enough that their *Maid's Tragedy* had scantly pleased. But consider the *Scornful Lady*, which the town

had well liked, and their *Philaster*, over which it had gone mad! Chapman had deserted play-writing; was away somewhere, Southampton's guest, translating the great ancient Greek poet Homer, a task that would take months. Permitting her guest to extract what comfort he might from this schoolmanly preoccupation of his rival, Mistress Montjoy veered swiftly away from talk of Chapman, but so skilfully that, in another moment, they were discussing Jonson's latest success as though it flowed as a matter of course from the talk of Chapman and Homer. Ben's *Alchemist*, according to Mistress Montjoy, had positively fired London. Burbage, as usual, was playing the lead and according to Mistress Montjoy, with rare spirit. She confessed to as great a liking for Burbage as a misliking for his rival, Field. Compare Burbage with Field. She had seen his Richard—here Mistress Montjoy pulled herself up short as though suddenly remembering that her guest was a playwright—and Will's *Richard Third*—three times. Burbage stirred the blood, whereas Field—— She herself had slept listening to Field's slow, cold chanting. She favoured the *Silent Woman* above all Ben's work—oh, yes, far beyond the *Alchemist*. But for an afternoon's entertainment, give her the *Woman Killed with Kindness* or the *Shoemaker's Holiday*. The woman did not live whose heart could not respond to the sadness of the one and the gaiety of the other. She had always said and would always maintain that Ben knew naught about women. She considered that the *Silent Woman* proved this contention. Had not *Epicœne*, his best woman, turned out to be a man? For herself, she liked plays that dealt with people like those about her; women she could have been and in scenes she might have known. Not for her the bloodless nymphs of the *Faithful Shepherdess* or *Philaster* on the one hand, the strange walking dolls that Ben made on the other. As for the *Woman Killed with Kindness*—there was a heroine might have been her own sister, Bess, so natural was she! And so on, and on, and on until Montjoy's grating voice called from below, "Aho there! Shall we never eat? 'Tis weli said, 'A woman's tongue. . . .'"

The slow spring twilight had settled into complete darkness when Shakspere at last pulled away from the Montjoys. A

long, slim new moon had slunk almost to the horizon. Yet it shed light enough to reveal a faint wet wash of street; blank parallel stretches of half-timbered walls; black rectangles of street signs. The night had turned chill; a sharp and knifelike wind searched out the openings in his cape. He drew it closer about him as he turned in the direction of Cheapside. Physically, the bath, the delectable hot supper, the delicious cool ale had refreshed him. But mentally——! He could not say that Mistress Montjoy's chatter had inspired him; at times, even, it had hurt: but at least for a while it had ousted from his mind the accumulated melancholies of the last three months. Now that her cheerful presence had gone, those humours flowed back in a sinister black flood. And indeed, one or two of Mistress Montjoy's remarks had pricked into faint being a dead desire, a lost regret. . . . Southampton and Anne . . . For an instant the old pain seared a fiery trail across his heart. Women named Anne had played important parts in his life, he reflected; Anne, his sister, the playmate of his childhood—pink-and-white, doll-faced, dead ere she had matured. Anne Hathaway, the sweetheart of his boyhood! Sleek-haired was Anne Hathaway and dove-eyed; the brown of the country sun struggling with the pink of the country air for the mastery of her cheeks. Anne, as round and warm as a pigeon—and as unthinking. And then Anne Davenant, the passion of his maturity. What had there been about Anne Davenant that could make a half-decade of agony in a sane man's life? She was not beautiful. He himself, in one of his bitter rebellions against her spell, had avowed that in verse. But there was something—— No, her face was not beautiful; it was the colour of whey and it kept, except at the creeping-in of her silver smile, a strange, still look. And her little flat figure was not beautiful, though it was so delicate that she moved like a shadow. Nor her jet-black, straight, coarse hair. Nor her rather slitted, heavily lidded eyes, so shadow-smooched, so vivid and sparkless. But the combination of all this with her mouth! Surely no woman had ever owned a mouth like Anne's—so wide-centred and deep-cornered, so cool and so warm, so lusciously crimson that, flaring out of the pallor of her face, it was like a blood-hot signal to the senses. Southampton and Anne . . . The image of his friend—and

rival—suddenly hung clear in his mind: the lithe, long, white-skinned youth with his chestnut curls and his brilliant colour; his brown eyes shot with red lights; his dashing aspect and his dreaming look; his profundities of thought; his elegances of expression. Well, at least now he could put the two names together in his mind without a sense of utter spiritual annihilation. And even as his pain dulled, their images vanished from his mental vision. His real problem lifted its gaunt face there.

Should he ever write again? Had it gone for good—that rushing, flooding impulse which, on command, had turned his youth to a creative orgy, had sometimes evolved and finished a play in a week? Was this paralysis but a temporary mental deadness or was it old age . . . the flickering out of the creative faculty? He had accommodated himself to many things in a lifetime of work. Once he had created the dramatic mode, had led. Now he followed, aped other men's efforts and at, it seemed, a slower and slower pace. Those younger blades of the drama—Beaumont, Fletcher. . . . How *they* poured it forth, and in what variety and with what felicity! Well, he must follow where their star led. Aye, he was content to follow, if he could only produce a big thing in the new mode. But he could produce nothing. What had happened to him or what was the fault in him? Always he had wondered—and now he considered the problem afresh—if a man's work were so closely engaged with a man's life that he must live a life especially constructed for that work. For himself, try as hard as he could to disengage himself from mortal tangles, he had had to live long segments of his life as though his work had not even existed. Southampton had, of course, dominated such a segment; Anne Davenant another. And whatever the cost of his work, he would not part with even the memory of that magic madness. Long living it had been with him at first and short working; then longer and harder working, shorter and shorter living; until now life was all working. Perhaps that was the flaw in him—that very concentration may have marred his quality.

Yet there was Ben! No man had worked harder than Ben; and Ben had for decades lived a life that was but pendant to his work. Of course, Ben's youth had sown vigorous wild oats . . . that interval in the Low Countries. For that

matter, Ben had killed his man and gone to prison. . . . But he had chosen London for the scene of the major portion of his work and in filthy, greasy, stinking London he had stayed, dominating the literary life of the town as indeed—there had never been an atom of jealousy in Shakspere's admiration for Ben—he deserved to dominate it. On the other hand—Marlowe! At his youth's peak, Kit had thrown himself into the flaming abyss at the very centre of life, had let its fires eat his vitals; had died of his love of life; had died at the hands of life itself. Did Marlowe have the right of it? And Kyd and Greene—those wasters of heydey? "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Illium?" God, it was worth going out in one hell-hot stab at joy to have written those lines. They too—the whole trio—had stayed in the city, had drunk deep of its poison. Was, after all, the swift thrust at life the wiser way? However, it was useless now to regret that he had not followed other men's paths, led they to sanity or madness; for *he* could not stay in the city, try as hard as he would. Just as London had held him in hot enchantment in the beginning, she had released him frost-cold in the end. And then the country had begun to pull on him. He had deafened his ears to the luring plea as long as he could. But in the end, it had haled him back to Stratford—that low, wild-dove call. Another motive came in here—in honesty he had to admit it. He wanted to write the Shakspere name strong on Stratford life again. It was a sacred duty; his father had laid it on him. *That* was one of the things a man must do; he had no choice there. And yet again—doubt. Should a poet engage in commerce with sacred obligations? What had he to do with that pale-blooded wench, Duty? Was not the poet his own law? Well, like the oaf he was, docilely, without question, he had followed the incitement of the Shakspere blood. He had returned to Stratford. He had made the Shakspere strain a power. New Place was pointed out, gaped at. . . . And Anne had risen in importance as his position increased. Of course, there had been the old wound of his years of absence in London, but that wound had healed. Anne was a placid woman whose heart held its own tenderness, rejected its own bitterness. And fate had brought her fair social fortune in her two daughters. Sukey had made a

notable match; Judy had been bridesmaid at the Harvard wedding. . . .

Perhaps it was because he was not entirely of the city nor entirely of the country that he wrote well of neither. The *Woman Killed with Kindness* . . . the *Shoemaker's Holiday* . . . Mistress Montjoy's babble again. . . . No, *he* never could equal either Heywood or Dekker in their chosen fields, he told himself. Once in an attempt to rewrite *Three Ladies from London*, he had essayed to paint the town and once, in *Cardenna*, the country. But he had failed; failed so lamentably that he gave over the blurred, confused, half-written things, the one to Heywood, the other to Fletcher. He himself liked to write of lands so far away, of times so long ago, or of countries and ages so entirely imagined that no critic could dispute his fancyings. Such a fantasy his new play was to be! If ever it came into existence at all . . . God, how tortured he was with its formlessness and vagueness! An island. Somewhere? No, nowhere. An island floating between sea and sky. An island as airy and gossamer as a cloud, as delicately imagined as a vision. And on it three beings. A maiden. A slim, pure, virgin thing, Mirandola? Mirala? Mironda? No, Miranda. Yes, that was it, *Miranda*. And an old man, a wiseacre, a sage—Prospero. An old man who had exorcised that island in a breath, could banish it in an eye-wink! "We are of such stuff as dreams are made of and our little life is rounded with a . . . sleep." Already some of the lines were drifting into his head. And then for contrast with those two, unnamed as yet, unbodied—for, strain mind and soul as he would, he could not see him—an ugly, misshapen creature, hobgoblin, leprechaun, gargoyle. The whole thing should be a film of faery—a work to make the *Night's Dream* seem of the earth and clodlike. The name was clear, *A Summer's Tale*.

And that was all!

That had been all for three months. The island and the three people on it and the name, *A Summer's Tale*. Perhaps it was too much of faery. At any rate, it hung impalpable, shapeless and colourless in the high, dry ether of his mind. Months, months, months, it had been since that fiery uprushing torrent of the spirit had made precipitation. Nothing he had done would produce more. Not thinking until his

brain turned. Not reading until his eyes ached. Not walking the lanes about Stratford until his legs cramped. Not talking until he hated the town and every soul in it. Not dreaming. Not cursing. So now to see what London would do—the London which, at his appearance, had opened her gate, tempted him with the clue to success, and then, by the mere poisonous hap that Anne Davenant visited there her sister, fed like a cold-crazed, thirst-crazed monster on the fires and dews of his youth.

It seemed to Shakspere that he had been walking a long time, so fast and so painfully had his thoughts sped. Yet, in reality, it had been but a few moments from Silver Street to Cheapside and along Cheapside to the Mermaid Tavern. Only an occasional figure now and then had passed him on the street, and now he entered a silent courtyard. Hooded wagons made vague, looming shapes under a sprinkle of stars. In the shadows, horses fretted with hoof-pawings and tail-swishings. A white cat flashed from under his feet. But no human stirred, and the Inn was quiet. He made off at an angle toward the left, and at a corner room on the first floor, knocked with a peculiar and vibrant tattoo. Without waiting for a summons to enter, he opened the door and stood on the threshold of a fair-sized room, light in colour, heavily raftered, with big casement windows on two walls and a vast fireplace at one end.

His appearance produced an instant of petrifaction among the half circle of men sitting about the fire. Then, "By God, 'tis Will!" exclaimed the huge creature who was the keystone of their arch. He raised his unwieldy bulk off the double-sized stool which supported it and paddled like a hurrying bear toward the door. It was a bear-hug, too, to which he subjected Shakspere, and after the embrace was over, he patted him on shoulders, arms, and back with his monstrous paws. "God's wounds, I'm glad to see you. Marry, you smell of the country, lad—clover and new-mown hay."

The others, except one who sat writing in a corner, crowded about Shakspere. That other was a tall, lean, yellow fellow of a cadaverous and moustached mien. He made a sudden gesture, and instantly they all chanted in unison: "An upstart crow, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide,

supposes he is as able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you!" They ended with a vigorous "Hail, Will of Avon, hail!"

Shakspere grinned as he shook hands with them—Burbage and Beaumont, Fletcher and Hemminge.

"How beats the tiger's heart?" the man in the corner asked cheerfully, still bending to his work.

"Fiery as of yore," Shakspere averred, shaking his disengaged hand. "On my word, Tom Heywood," he declared to his interlocutor, "and be God my witness, when I departed for Stratford last spring, I left you scribbling in this corner and on my return, I find you busy at the self-same spot. How many plays have you writ in these twelve months?"

"Five!" Heywood declared laconically, stopping to twist his long, thin, out-standing yellow moustaches and to impale Shakspere with a humorous glare from his cadaverous face. "And acted in all of them—and I've turned some verses besides. And according to my wont all writ on tavern bills."

"Not another heroic poem, I pray thee, Tom!" Shakspere said with the out-handed gesture of one fending off offence.

Before Heywood could reply, the rafters rang with the long-sustained, boisterous derision of his companions. And so, instead of answering, he kept on tranquilly writing until they had stopped. "Keep up those alarums," he threatened, "and I write an epic to-night."

"Come close to the fire, Will," Ben Jonson ordered, "and let's see how the rural air likes thee." The company resumed their places in a crescent about the blaze. Hemminge placed a stool for Shakspere at Jonson's right. "We lack cheer!" Jonson exclaimed, first peering into the depths of the enormous tankard which he held in a colossal paw and then shaking it with a circular motion. "What ho, boy!" he called. As there was no immediate response, "Boy! Boy!" he boomed in successive roars. And when the door opened on a peaked, smirched slice of scared boy face, "Bring us on wine, boy, Canary now, of the best and plenty of it. At once! You hear? I'll cut your gizzard out before your eyes and roast it at this very fire else." As the door precipitately closed, he turned on Shakspere an enormous visage, all rounded leathery contours from which emerged at the chin a

straggle of black beard, picked with white, and above the forehead a scratch of hair, black and stiff as wire. Somewhere between the two and in the deepest folds of the leathery skin were set the mere black twinkles that were his extraordinary eyes. "Tell us of Stratford, Will. By God, bully boys, I long for green fields. The city tires and drags me. Some day, Will Shakspere, I'll take you at your word and come to Stratford on a visit. 'Twas but yesterday Drayton and I spoke with longing of that future junket."

"Come, Ben, do!" Shakspere entreated. "New place has rooms we use not. Come, all of you!" He smiled about the circle, now sitting on stools before the fire, their empty mugs beside them, their eyes on him. Then the smile crooked, shrank, disappeared as another consideration, more acerb, curdled it. "But talk we not of Stratford, I pray thee. It's yon accursed country quiet I've run away from. Give me talk of London. Odds, how I've thirsted for it! What's new here? No pretty chatter of court and politics an it please you, lads! I yearn for gossip of hussies and harlots, cutthroats and cutpurses, gulls and conies."

"Would you had but come a moment since," Dick Burbage answered. "The two Toms, Dekker and Middleton, were here and full of their new comedy the *Roaring Girl*. Knew ye ever Moll Frith, Will?"

Shakspere nodded dissent. "But ever I've heard talk of her," he added.

"Well, yon twain have spent long days—and longer nights, 'tis likely—studying the ways of that fair filthy dame—their Roaring Girl. By Lady, Will, she's unpaired in my experience. Full of strange oaths and stranger talk. And tales! Man, she pours adventure as others pour out dullness."

"How looks she?" asked Beaumont's voice from the other end of their row. And, "Before God, Frank, we've seen the jade!" came Fletcher's comment from the same quarter. Burbage turned and crossed his legs in the direction of the query. As ever, when Burbage was present, Shakspere followed his motions. How could a man so fleshed melt movement into a grace so exquisite? Just as on the stage, though tallow-faced and thickly featured, he transformed himself into a god. And as inevitably as Shakspere watched his friend's motion, he listened for his friend's voice—that sleek,

silky voice that could make thunder of a whisper and turn every woman in the pit white with the stilled passion of its love-sighing. What a Romeo he had been—the beautiful noble face of him! And then his Richard, which had turned the affrighted city madams faint; had made them forget who wrote that Richard. Acting in the same play with Burbage, Shakspere reflected whimsically, he had often acted better than he could—that voice had made him. Dick, Shakspere reflected, had had his problems too. Should he have acted or painted? And had he chosen acting—Shakspere had often pondered this—because of that old debt, or because it was easier drifting. . . .

Beaumont, on the other hand, presented always one aspect to the world, albeit a noble and beautiful one. He was the handsomest man of them all, tall and fair, golden-bearded, with wide-opened, strangely set green eyes; statuesquely cut as to figure. No one of them really knew Francis Beaumont, except it be Fletcher; and Shakspere had his moments when he doubted if even John knew his partner and collaborator. It was not his university education that held them off from Beaumont or him from them; for both Fletcher and Jonson had equal learning. Or his court connections, for the Mermaid circle had the imperviousness to rank which associated genius often begets. No, it was a quality of remoteness from which nothing in life or any degree of living could ever free Beaumont. . . . What had dragged Beaumont down from those mental mountain fastnesses to go to play-writing?

Fletcher was as different from Beaumont as he well might be; little, dark, tousled-looking, effeminately made; of an extraordinary silver-wittedness, mental warmth and, above all, creative fecundity. John spawned plots as he talked. It was a perfect collaboration, Shakspere had always thought; for Beaumont supplied judgment, taste, a sense of proportion, constructive ability, workmanlike scrupulosity, and a real poetic quality. Fletcher, on the other hand, brought to their work a virgin forest of thought and idea, plot and plan. Shakspere admired and respected Beaumont, but he had a strange mental affinity with Fletcher.

"You'd remembered Moll Frith, had you seen her, John," Burbage informed Fletcher, dryly. "She's as tall as Frank and I'll not say as big, but bigger. She can hold two lads

with her one hand while she murders them with the other—a fist as big as the hoof of a horse. A handsome wench besides—red-headed and yellow-eyed. Her hair comes to her heels and sometimes it pleases her to wear it in that fashion. 'Tis a blaze then, running from her head to the ground. She's fought her way, every inch, to her bawdy throne. No woman loves her, nor would dare cross her, but would give her soul to be chosen as her friend. No man crosses her, nor would dare love her, but would give his ears to be picked as her swain. She's fleeced more gulls and conies—— Not at all unlike," he added, dryly, "although their spheres be far separate, our late noble virgin majesty, Elizabeth."

"'Tis pity, Will, you saw her not first," said Hemminge.

And at that, the room filled with ribaldry. The adoring reverence, the admiring worship that poor stupid John Hemminge held for Will Shakspere was the jest and butt of the Mermaid Club. Ben, especially at this moment, shook like a mountain of jelly. Hemminge was placidly aware of his derision and as placidly indifferent to it. He turned now his big gray eyes—save for their love as expressionless as those of a hound—upon the object of his solicitude. He was a big, bulky creature—Hemminge. Beside Beaumont he was as a farm stallion to a knight's charger. Yet on their trips through the stews of the town, it was to John Hemminge, not to Beaumont, that the Dolls and Molls and Polls shot their first lewd welcomes of glance and greeting.

"True, John!" Shakspere applauded, dryly. "'Tis pity I saw her not first. 'Tis pity—I know you think, and I agree—that any of these poor scribblers here was ever born to take from me dramatic share of the romance and poetry that lies bound in merry England."

"Oh, Will"—Fletcher turned the talk—"hast heard of Daborne and his new children's company? More 'little eyases' to make us trouble. Of the new theatre near the Paris Gardens. . . ."

The talk went on. The smoochy waiter lad—his scared eye scuttling at Jonson's every move to Jonson's face—filled their tankards with Canary again and again and again. The big fire died down at intervals, but someone always replenished it from a pile of logs at the side. When the flames burned high, they turned the little rounds of opaque glass in

the casements to files of glaring eyes; the room seemed crowded. They illuminated the farthest corner, except that one, already illumined by the flame of a candle, where twinkling Tom Heywood wrote steadily on, despite the talk—wrote steadily on even though he joined in that talk. The big plain room had an aspect of home to Shakspere; for it had housed thousands of wine-bedewed, discussion-ridden nights whose talk had touched the stars. Every drawing on its walls was familiar to him, every ribald couplet. And the men in it were his friends, true and tried. Not that he had not had his differences, major and minor, with them; not that he liked them equally. But no one among them but was linked in some picturesque or glorious way into the chain of his London existence. And when the blaze died down to a softer glow that failed to pick out faces, its gleam on pewter tankards, on laughter-filled eyes, companioned the room again for him. Shakspere listened and drew them out for stories; listened and, if the talk threatened to run into one of their uproarious duels of wit, drew them out again. But that did not happen often. By sheer force of will, he made it a night of anecdote and reminiscence. There was plenty of talk. There were the latest tales of Henslowe's niggardliness—no Mermaid night was a success without a Henslowe interval. From Beaumont there were stories of the production of the *Knight of the Burning Pestle;* from Fletcher, of the handsome way Tom Heywood had helped them in their satire on him; from Ben, of the production of the *Alchemist* and of the difficulties he was having with a new play, *Cataline*—"a damned dull drama of desperation!" he described it. So dull had it become, indeed, that he had begun a new, highly contrasting one. When the talk turned to the past, Jonson spun a long yarn of the week he and Marston and Chapman spent in prison the time *Eastward Ho!* was produced. Burbage told of his acting experiences as a child—those reminiscences went as far back as *Hieronimo*—interspersed with such bits of impromptu acting as made his auditors hold their breath. . . .

As long after midnight Shakspere turned into Montjoy house, it was with a sense of perfect calm. All his melancholies had vanished in the high, clear wind of London talk. To-morrow he would sit him down and write, write—oh, God, how he would write!

But next morning, although the day was rare and the sun poured its heartening gold over the entire London world, though quill and white paper were close at hand, though Mistress Montjoy by whispered bribes or threats held the entire household under the spell of a quietude like death itself, write he could not. Eyes closed, mind held taut, he tried to relive last night's rapturous mood; to distill it into the day's expression. All useless! He scribbled half-lines and broken phrases, drew strange amateur pictures, thought hard with his down-bent head clutched in his hands; thought hard, pacing the room the while, thought hard, face-down upon his bed. All useless! Anything else he might accomplish. But of a certainty one thing he could not do—and that was write. It added to his sense of gloom that out of his early-morning talk with Mistress Montjoy he had gleaned a coming trouble in the Montjoy family. The old dispute in regard to their daughter Juliet, and her dowry. . . . Montjoy and his son-in-law no longer spoke; there were whispers about a suit at law. Of course, in that case, he'd be summoned as a witness. Well, he'd stand with Juliet—the pet of his long years of living with the Montjoy family. This phantom care kept coming between him and his thought. Maddened at last by his ineptness and deadness, he seized his hat and cape; sallied forth. Automatically he made toward Cheapside.

It was a fair London scene, the day clear, the wind flawing but brisk; and in other times or in another mood, Shakspere's heart would have leaped to the colour and bustle and gaiety of it all. Cheapside was crowded with shoppers and strollers; housewives with baskets; gallants in plumes and laces; homespun gawks from the country, pop-eyed with amaze. The shops were wide, and the brilliant sun caught on diamonds and jet, on taffeta and linsey-woolsey, on silver and leather, on feathers and laces. Above, swinging vigorously in the wind, the shop-signs made a moving aërial frieze, painted in violent scenes with colours equally violent. Horsemen passed with an imperious swiftness through the crowd which edged off to give them room. Once, one of the decade's newfangled riding-contrivances—a coach—drove leisurely, with its span of horse, into their midst. Still a rarity in that busy district, it provoked all the ridicule, ribaldry, and raucousness of which the 'prentices of Cheap were capable, notwithstand-

ing the lovely lady inside, who, displaying a rosy indignation, hastily put on her mask. In the midst of all this, an inquisitive fellow lolling at his work, an idle eye raking the street, got glimpse of Shakspere. Immediately his shrill cry, "Ho, lads, 'tis Will Shakspere! Will of the Globe! Will of the King's men!" was caught up by his fellows till all about the streets rang with "Hi, Will!" and "Ho, Will!"

Shakspere doffed his hat and waved it with his most professional—and mechanical—smile. How his heart had jumped the first time Cheap had cheered him! He had not written, on that long-ago thrilled day, a single word—but it was not from mental sterility, only from surplusage of charmed emotion. Now that chorus was as hollow to him as the beating of a child's hand on a drum. He was conscious only of the city stinks and, for the first time, of a longing for the sweet freshness of the Warwickshire air. "Hi, Will! Ho, Will!" The cry ran down the street as successive lines of shopmen took it up. Shakspere continued mechanically to smile, gracefully to wave his hat. Presently the cheers ran down. He turned on the bridge, slowed down his brisk walk to a saunter. Now the scene, though less gay, was more beautiful. He stopped and listlessly surveyed it. The Thames—it was the brief interval between tides—stretched like a vast carpet of satin, taut except where now and then, as though insecurely fastened, it rippled in the breeze: and blue save where the sun—— His mind made little flicker at verse. "Faint, gilded pools where yet the——" And then it caught with violence on that oral snag, *gilded*, and ceased. Was ever poet haunted by a single word as he by *gilded?* A cold, stark disgust with certain crystallized habits of expression added its burden to his mood. Apathetically he continued to gaze on the scene.

Boats were gliding from shore to shore over the suave river surface, and the cries of the boatmen, "Eastward ho!" and "Westward ho!" came in a faint music to his ears. Close to the banks swans drifted. Along the north shore—flower gardens linking them softly with the river and the velvet lawns holding them rigidly apart—stretched the splendid pile of palaces which was the haughtiest element in the city's many-faceted beauty. Along the same bank, but back of him, nondescript shops and dwellings ran to the square, geometric

gray hulk of the Tower. Between them, as though offering sacred barricade against social admixture—huge as a great ship, but anchored—bulked St. Paul's. Beyond them all, made soft by the city's spire-pierced smoke, rolled vivid green hills. Across the river, the theatres and gardens, the stews and bagnios huddled together as though in a desperate effort to conceal the true quality of their entertainment. And apart from them all, wrapped in austerity, St. Mary's Overy mourned and meditated. The breeze flawed. One moment it brought strongly to his nose the odours from the palace gardens; another it carried faintly to his ears the roar of the lions in the Tower.

After a while, he moved—almost without direction—on. His professional eye, sweeping the South Bank, had noted that no flag hung out at the Globe. No performance that day. He wondered vaguely why. In the same apathy, but following his habit, he looked up as he passed off the bridge to the superstructure which topped it. Yes, his luck symbol of other days—the skull of some poor long-dead, traitorous devil which had always seemed, most amiably and encouragingly, to grin on him—still stuck to its pike.

He had thought he would continue on to the Globe, but the absence of the flag changed his mind. After a moment of indecision, he turned to the left, plunged into a maze of tiny streets. They grew broader and more residential in character as they pulled away from London Bridge. Finally, he came to a trim little common. On the daisy-specked grass, children were playing. A line of geese drew a white streak over the green as they rocked toward the watering trough in the centre. At one of the small houses, half-timbered and of a smiling domestic appearance, Shakspere paused, knocked.

"Why, it's Master Shakspere!" exclaimed the black-eyed, warmly hued woman who opened the door to him. And frankly she held up the bursting bloom of her lips to his kiss. "How now, Mistress Harvard," Shakspere answered, saluting her. "How dare'st flower so in the London air? Or is it Stratford roses that still glow in thy cheek? And how fairly you are placed!" he added, as she conducted him inside.

The room they entered was bigger than, from the outside,

the house seemed able to contain. High casements were partly open to the breeze and, burning through their bulleyes, the sun had flecked the floor with its own marquetry. At one side, a bunch of spring posies filled a pewter bowl; and the bowl lay beside a big volume that nearly covered the table. Mistress Harvard drew a chair—high-backed and carved—for Shakspere, seated herself in another, the hand of each arm clasping the dimpled elbow of its fellow. "Tell me of Stratford," she begged, her big eyes, a trifle too full for real beauty, dancing; the warm colour flooding and receding. Shakspere conscientiously told her the news of the town. That was what interested her most, though she made perfunctory inquiries as to his work, ending with—was it a new play had brought him to London? To Shakspere's great relief, however, she did not ask its name, nor what it was about. Adroit as he was in conversation—and he had enough instinctive sympathy and sense of humour to produce unlimited volume of even Mistress Harvard's kind—he was conscious of a feeling of relief when her husband appeared.

John Harvard was one of the few of the younger generation in Stratford with whom Shakspere had a real mental clutch. He was a big, raw-boned man; his broad shoulders in perpetual stoop; his gray eyes always gaunt with his midnight studying. Harvard had none of the poet in him; but he was a student of an inspired order.

Shakspere had often gone to him when, in his work, he struck snags of history, science, medicine, or the law. The big book on the table, a recent purchase which he immediately displayed to Shakspere, was an evidence of a scholarly rather than a religious trend in him. It was that new version of the Bible, of which for months there had been so much talk. The two men drew up to the table, lost themselves in examination and discussion. "We have it not yet at Trinity," Shakspere said.

In the meantime, Mistress Harvard slipped out of the house. When she returned she was carrying a struggling, lusty, round-cheeked urchin whose eyes—as big and black as his mother's—were pouring tears at being yanked untimely from his play. "'Tis young John Harvard!" Mistress Harvard interrupted the two men to announce, "and you may tell them all, Will Shakspere, when you go back to

Stratford, that you had to come to London to see a child who was born a man."

He had called on the Harvards—Shakspere admitted it frankly to himself—not so much for old friendship's sake as in the hope that talk with Harvard would set those diamond-sharp creative wheels in motion. But no such phenomenon manifested itself. Their talk, enthusiastic on Harvard's side, perfunctory on his own, had resulted in nothing—that is if you called that sudden burning desire, unexpected as it was uncontrolled, for Stratford nothing; that sudden avid itch for the country quiet, the large lustred country stars, the dew-wetted, cooling dark, the country sunshine with its flower smells and summer colouring, nothing. . . .

The game was up!

London had failed him. To-morrow he would go back to New Place.

He did not know—so long and aimlessly had he wandered the Bankside streets—how he came to arrive at the Globe. Habit, of course, he reflected, wearily. He had gone like a homing horse straight to the familiar stall. But once at the Globe, he suddenly found himself fatigued. He went in.

Ah, that was the reason the flag was not up! And, of course, now he remembered that in the course of a long droning talk from his point of view as secretary of the Globe, Hemminge had told him last night that the theatre was closed temporarily! Some unexpected repairs after the ravages of the winter storms had suddenly become necessary. A pair of carpenters—rough fellows enough—were pulling up the rotten boards in the centre under the big blue patch of open sky. At the side was a pile of fresh boards; tools. Shakspere seated himself on a second pile of boards, surveyed with the lacklustre eyes the empty boxes, the long stage protruding into the body of the house. The carpenters gave one look in his direction; accepted him apparently as a part of this strange theatrical world; went on with their talk. Low-voiced at first, it presently ignored him, rose to a normal tone. The sun lifted higher and higher. An agreeable wood smell emanated from the boards which made his seat. Shakspere fell into a muse that was so without thought that it was almost without consciousness. It was as though his will, ex-

hausted by his efforts, had dropped her hand from the wheel of creative impulse; had gone to sleep. The younger carpenter had been talking about his strange adventure for a minute or two before his words began to penetrate to Shakspere's hearing. For that interval, vaguely soothed by his own mental quiet, Shakspere tried not to hear him. Then one detail more acid than the rest broke into that void, roused all his sense of life to sudden ravenous sensitiveness. He listened.

"Aye, Rafe," he was saying, in answer to his companion's question; "I be sailor ever since I was lad. Aye, I was one of Sir Jarge Summer's men. Aye, I took that voyage into the new western sea. Aye, I seen and heard things thou'd not believe, man!"

Rafe was older and dry: a hollow-cheeked, dull-eyed, lantern-jawed yokel—Shakspere knew the type well enough—full of yawning buffoonery and ribald skepticisms. "Aye, Stephen," he commented, with a burst of laughter. "Well, I know you sailormen and your tales and your lies. I mind me, my wife's brother went with Raleigh to Ginny. What he told—— We doused him well in the horse-trough one morn, and after that, his tales grew smaller."

Stephen laughed too—and not ill-naturedly. He could afford to laugh. He was a big, black-browed, thick-bodied lad with a neck like a bull's. As he tore and lifted, Shakspere saw through his ragged shirt the swift play under the skin of muscles netted with blue and red tattoo. He had a long, sea-cleared gray gaze that now took quiet measure of his fellow. Perhaps it was the certainty that he could have thrown the skeptic over his head that made him answer mildly: "Aye. 'Tis true. Sailormen do oft make romance where the plain truth would seem more strange." And then he followed this statement by an irritating—but beguiling—silence.

For a moment no sound fell but the splintering of planks, the hammering home of wooden nails.

"Tell thy tale, Stephen," Rafe suddenly burst out. "For aught I know, ye be the first truthful sailorman that e'er I met. Tell thy tale in peace. I'll give thee my ears."

"'Tis strange," Stephen answered. "'Tis passing strange—this tale of mine. And I ask no man to put his faith on't.

Yet 'tis no lie! I give ye but God's truth and there's an end on't. We sailed from London—as good and strong a crew as e'en the queen, good Bess, God rest her soul, could e'er have wanted. Englishmen all—save one. And that one, a black-avised fellow—not blackamoor, you understand; yet hairy as an ape with a face so gnarled and strange 'twould frighten children. 'A was humped a little in the back and 'a swung in's walk. And 'a had arms so bulged with strength 'a could squeeze a man to death like a bear. Rings 'a wore in his ears, of gold, and a kerchief on's head, red and yellow, gay as a fairing and a knife in's belt as had a curving blade would carve a man's guts out at one stroke. His name was some outlandishness we ne'er could twist our tongues to . . . so called we him Cal."

"Those little twisty men be fearsome powerful in the wrestle," Rafe declared.

"We sailed with fair weather and the fair weather sailed with us. The sea—'twas as smooth as—smooth as—smooth as the top of the mug when the foam's settled. 'Twas a glad crew we were at first, too; full of japes and jests and the strange talk of land and sea all sailorfolk know. But one thing we lacked—drink. 'Twas a skipper that knew the sea and a brave trouncer of men, but a niggard of grog. The days crept by and still no grog. Came more days and still none. The men fretted and murmured. But the sun kept with us and there was no real crying out until we struck the islands——"

"What islands, Stephen?" Rafe asked.

"The Bermoothes, man. Hast not heard what Sir Jarge Summers found? A group of little islets, some no bigger than your hand, some bigger than all London town, spread out on a sea, green and blue, like a peacock's tail. We hove to there and rested. Sir Jarge and his fellows went ashore to see if there might perchance be treasure of gold or precious stones——"

"And were there treasure?" Rafe cut in, eagerly.

"Not that I have heard. But once they'd gone, among us crew, the murmurs grew for grog. Grog we asked—grog! If not—plain beer or ale. But whene'er we asked—polite and civil though we were—plain *no* was all we got. So one night, late, this hairy man, this Cal, he steals him a firkin

of wine from the ship's stores and three of us—me and him and old frosty gaffer, Trink—we three slipped over the side of the ship into a boat and rowed us to the shore."

"'Twas fair venturesome," Rafe commented.

"Venturesome. You'd say venturesome, indeed, knew ye all. But list! Over the island we went, stopping to gaze at all about us and drinking as we gazed. 'Twas passing fair, that scene; flowers like jewels and sweet-smelling shrubs; no high trees but bushes that were mountain-size and all a-bloom and birds that sang most hurtsome sweet. And the air so glad and soft. . . . We gazed and gazed, and the more we gazed, the more we drank and the more we drank, the more we gazed. . . . And then the dusk came on and still we gazed and drank. But once 'twas dark, by God, fear caught us. For lights began to come, to flash in the air, to dance; lights so thick and big and bright as though the stars had fallen, and always a-dance, here, there, everywhere. . . ."

. "'Twas glowworms!" Rafe skeptically announced.

"Man, I say 'twas dancing lights; there, low on the ground; here, higher than a man's head. They sparked and went out and sparked again. We tried at first to catch one—as well try to catch and hold the sunshine. And then a great fear came across us for, on a sudden, we saw—not far off, yet so near we could have touched him—a little minnikin. . . ."

"A little minnikin? What mean ye?"

"A little man-thing, no taller than my arm. It danced before us—all wound up in white, mist-like, with shining jewel eyes and mouth that smiled, beguiling, like a maid's. And 'a beckoned! We chased it. Cal, Trink, and me, in the fairy light we chased it, over hill and brook, through briar and bush; but still we catched it not. 'Twas, fairy too—it floated with unfair aid from wind and breeze. But on we ran, and on and on. And as we ran a tempest came—tempest with roaring thunder as broke my ears and such lightning as split the sky in twain, twin sheets of fire. And rain—'twas like a monster fagot pack beating us on backs and faces. And in that tempest, all the fairy lights went out; the minnikin leapt away. But fright had sucked the very guts from out us! We ran in that pouring sea till we could run no longer; fell; raised up; ran once more, staggering-like, till we all three

dropped on our faces—slept, with the tide of rain pouring on us; slept till noon. . . ."

"And what came of it?" asked Rafe.

"Naught! When we woke 'twas bright blue day, the sun shining round in the sky. The minnikin—we saw it not again. But through it all, Trink holds him fast to the firkin. And when we two, Cal and me, woke chatter-toothed, 'Here's my comfort!' says Trink; and pulls long at the wine."

"And how came you back to the ship?" Rafe demanded.

"Oh, they put out from the ship a gang who searched until they found us."

"And what punishment gave they you?"

"Irons for sennight and bread and water in the hold. But Sir Jarge—too pleased he was a'd found the Bermoothes to hold his anger long—so soon on deck we came and made our voyage fair and safe to England."

"How now—did Cal and Trink mind them of that minnikin after their drink had passed?" Rafe asked, shrewdly.

"Never came we twain together without talk of it," Stephen asserted, gravely. "I see him now—the little misty wight, with eyes a-mock like elves, lips smiling, beguiling like a maid's, and wee hands beckoning. . . ."

Shakspere arose from his seat as from a dream. He moved so quietly that Stephen and Rafe took no note of his departure. He walked slowly at first, then swiftly across the bridge, up Cheapside to Silver and Muggle. As he neared the Montjoy house, he broke into a run. Once indoors, "What's happened to thee, Will Shakspere?" Mistress Montjoy asked. "Thy eyes are coals; thy colour fever-high."

Shakspere did not answer her query. "Send up paper to me, mistress," he begged. "All thou hast and then send out for more!" He ran, light as a lad, over the stairs. Once in his room, he seated himself at the table; drew a blank sheet to him. Writing swiftly, he inscribed, *A Summer's Tale.* Then he drew a line through the title; wrote

THE TEMPEST

Scene: A ship at sea.
A storm with thunder and lightning.

MARGARET BLAKE

By CHESTER T. CROWELL

From *Century*

I WAS fourteen years of age when Howard and Margaret Blake became our nearest neighbours. They built a house about a quarter of a mile from ours. Up to that time the nearest house had been two miles away. It seemed to me that the country was actually becoming crowded. Howard was about twenty-two years old, and Margaret, his wife, was about eighteen. It interested me to learn that they were going to try to make a living on six hundred and forty acres of ground or, as we then called such a tract in Texas, a section. My own parents had settled there in the days of no fences and had bought ten sections, probably for about twenty-five cents or less an acre. Even that much land was a farm; ranches would contain not fewer than twenty thousand acres.

Ours had always been a farming community. It was settled largely by Southern people and was as different from ranch country as though we had been people of a different race and nationality. The ranch country was uncouth, saloons flourished in the towns, and there were very few women. Our community had never permitted a saloon; we had a puritanical rigidity in our social customs that could scarcely have been excelled by any New England community. Our tiny little town of not more than eight hundred population had five or six pine church houses with the paint peeling off their clapboard steeples, blistered by a merciless summer sun on the outside and scorched by sulphur and brimstone sermons on the inside. In that time and place people took their religion with a thrill of terror. A man who said he loved God meant that his vertebræ rattled from panic fear when he contemplated the fate of the sinner.

Howard Blake was a hard-working man, as every pioneer

had to be, but he knew how to work and he liked it. Maggie —in a rural community Margaret would inevitably become Maggie—was usually with him. She helped him build the house, the barns, sheds, fences, chairs; she even helped him skin a calf when it had been killed. Meat had no commercial value then, but hides could be sold. As they worked they talked. It was evident they were very much in love with each other. In all my life I have never known another woman who so easily and naturally entered into the thoughts as well as the work of a man. I was always delighted to be with them. Sometimes when it rained, or on Sunday afternoons, they would lie down together on a pallet of wolf hides on the front porch, and Howard would laugh almost continuously for two or three hours, a pleasant sort of chuckle.

It was not until years later that I realized Howard was laughing because he was so happy he couldn't keep from laughing. She was his wife, his mistress, his sweetheart, his business partner, and the person he liked best to talk with. Such complete happiness must come to two people only rarely. I never heard them quarrel, and it is my honest opinion that they never did, for both were overflowing with generosity of spirit, and each was more than equal to any of the demands our primitive life made upon their energy.

Maggie was about five feet eight inches tall and rather slender, but with a large frame and large, but shapely, hands and feet. The first time I saw her I thought she was beautiful. Most persons would. Her eyes were a sort of hazel blue, and they not only smiled, but seemed to say in a hearty booming voice: "Welcome! You and I are going to be great friends." Meeting her was more like a reunion than getting acquainted. Within five minutes you had known her all her life. She brightened a cloudless spring morning for me with such a smile the first time I saw her, and then produced a piece of gingerbread about the size of a brick, and an enormous cup of buttermilk. They don't make such cups any more, and very little of such gingerbread. I was hers for life. Much as I loved gingerbread, however, I still think it was the spell of Maggie that got me. I remember watching her bare arms.

Howard and Maggie were very comfortably settled in their home before the year was out. They had made a good crop,

they had a garden and some flowers, and they were gradually making the interior of the house pretty after the fashion of the day, which wouldn't be much admired now, but I thought it was wonderful. Maggie seemed to be blooming like the flowers. Her face was rounder and had more colour; her arms were rounder, and she must have gained thirty pounds in weight. People said she "was the picture of health," and the neighbours expressed delight that our climate agreed with her so thoroughly, because it didn't agree with every one; the dryness was especially damaging to pretty complexions. Women whose faces were burned by the dry wind and who lost weight until their collar-bones became painfully prominent used to talk a great deal about Maggie's good fortune.

I was out with my dog one morning chasing rabbits on a hillside in the pasture when I saw old Doctor Wren drive up to the Blake place. I ran back home and told my mother. She put on her bonnet and went over there at once. The next day I was introduced to Howard Blake, Junior, who lay blinking at the sunlight with eyes so exactly like his mother's that it seemed he was already doing his best to smile a welcome as she did.

About five days later Howard and Maggie and I went hunting together, and Howard killed a deer. To me her going was nothing remarkable, but I can recall that it was the one subject of conversation at our table when women neighbours visited my mother. What interested them just as much was the fact that Maggie's pregnancy had never been apparent; she was evidently one of those rare women who enjoy the very zenith of good health in that condition.

I was very fond of the baby; the idea that boys do not like babies is a mistake growing out of the fact that dislike attracts more attention. They used to ask me sometimes to stay with the baby, and I never counted it a service. I remember how the little fellow used to crow like a young rooster when his mother returned, and his tiny little legs and hands would all be going at once, not feebly, but so rapidly and vigorously I doubt if one could have counted the motions of a single hand or foot. When she picked him up he would give a great sigh of happiness and then become very still, but his eyes would follow her face every moment until he fell asleep. When they sat looking at each other so, the picture

was one of indescribable beauty. No wonder so many artists have been moved to paint mother and child. But it cannot really be done, because there is mystery about that beauty. It isn't entirely for the eye. No; the very air is vibrant with it. The windows of the soul are opened to light and fragrance never sensed before. I have known husbands who were so dazed by the wonder of such a scene that they were suddenly embittered by a feeling of their own pitiful unimportance. Having given all he had to give an adored wife, the husband would realize at such a moment that she had passed into a new world beyond even male imagination, much less experience, and it would hurt cruelly. But Howard Blake was not such a one. He couldn't share it; no man could: but he worshipped at the shrine, and in a little while she came back to be his sweetheart and partner. A great many women forget to come back, but Maggie always came back quickly.

The following year, just after the crops were laid by, Howard Blake died. Typhoid fever, I think it was. He was ill only about two weeks. Death had always seemed very remote to me up to that time; some ghostly tale based on hearsay. Grief, in which was mixed considerable terror and enormous concern about his welfare in the next world, made me ill. Maggie stood the shock much more bravely. For a month there was a frightened look in her eyes, but she went resolutely about the work of the farm, and it was very soon evident that the property was going to be just as well cared for as ever. Farm hands could be hired for from eight to ten dollars a month, and they worked from dawn until dark, which was usually more than twelve hours. She never had any trouble getting "hands." They liked to work for her. It came to be understood that she could have the pick of them. They said she treated them well. I think they fell under her spell just as I did. She had a way of inspiring a man to tell her all about himself and his life. It was largely through these farm hands that she later knew what was going on in the town and community, after her contact with other people had ended. She knew how to give orders simply and sensibly, and her orders were always intelligent. She knew the business. I have often marvelled at her fortitude during this period, because I know her grief was terrible. The vital spark, the will to live, and her physical strength gave recuper-

ative powers I have never seen equalled. I do not think she had the slightest tendency toward brooding or introspection; in fact, her mind gave her little concern. Her intelligence was a great store of common sense. Abstract ideas bounced off her good-natured ignorance like so many rubber balls tossed at a brick wall. I doubt if she had ever read a single book.

I was then at an age when religion attacks a young man with considerable virulence and quite frequently entangles him in what he will later realize was a most amusing Chinese puzzle. I used to try to talk to her about religion sometimes, but I finally gave up. At first I was hurt because I thought she was not willing to share her ideas with me on account of my youth, but I finally discovered, to my astonishment, that she hadn't any ideas on that subject and not many on any other. In the normal course of events that should have cooled our friendship very appreciably, but it didn't. I don't remember that I liked her one bit less.

Some six months after Howard Blake's death, Sam Hodge, a young farmer who lived about four miles away, began calling regularly on Maggie. Sam was about twenty-eight years old, and I think it must be in some measure descriptive of the man to say that is just about all I remember about him. Other young men called on Maggie sometimes. One day my father asked me not to go there very often as I might be considered a suitor and he knew I had no such thought. That shocked me somewhat, but I worshipped my father and stood in awe of his wisdom. That was a day when boys were whipped unmercifully because of the injunction, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." My father was one of the few who spared the rod, and he won in return a loving obedience to his merest wish. I took it for granted that such a good man was in direct communication with God and knew everything.

I was very much preoccupied about that time with my religion. It was desperately serious for me, and I was puzzled because no one else seemed to understand that fact. Here was my immortal soul trembling, skidding, struggling, and crying out for light in about the most orthodox community one could imagine, and I couldn't get help. Then something happened that made me an atheist. I was running true to form for my age. It is my observation that a religious up-

heaval followed by a period of atheism in late adolescence are unfailing indications of good health and normal mental development. My atheism was superinduced by a tragedy in the lives of two very dear schoolmates. They were older than I by several years, but we had played together and been friends. The girl, Bessie, was engaged to the boy, Tom. They were to have been married in June, and they went out together three or four nights a week. They were models of good behaviour and extremely religious. Tom didn't even use tobacco. For some reason that always counted on the credit side of a man's devotion to religion in our community. I heard my mother tell my father what happened. She said:

"They let their foot slip."

He smiled, rather amused, I thought. Then he said:

"Well, they can get married right away."

"Bessie won't," my mother said.

"What!" Father exclaimed

And then Mother told the story. Bessie felt that she was not fit to marry any one. Tom, it seemed, was so shocked and puzzled that all he did was say he was "willing to marry her just the same." If he said it like that, it must have sounded like condescending to accept an inferior. As a matter of fact, I later learned that Tom didn't know whether Bessie was right or not. His instinct and common sense told him it didn't matter, but there was such a furor about it all that the mean little streak in him came out, and he began to wonder whether he was risking himself. He wanted to take good care of Tom. Bessie was merely living up to what she had been taught all her life, and now when her parents turned against their own teachings and tried to hurry the wedding, she considered them as vile as herself. In the midst of the scandal—and there need never have been one—Bessie ran away and entered an ordinary public house. She committed suicide there about two weeks later. My point of view had been just about the same as Bessie's. But right then and there my point of view underwent a violent change. I was an atheist and I wanted every one to know it. I wanted to fight about it.

I told Maggie about Tom and Bessie. She expressed no opinion. I think she was the only person who ever heard the story without expressing an opinion. She laughed. It

was an interesting story, and she enjoyed hearing it. Her laugh was an expression of appreciation for the entertainment I had provided in telling it.

Everyone supposed about this time that Maggie and Sam Hodge would be married. They had been "keeping company" for about five months, but he suddenly ceased to visit her. Everyone who knew either of them asked the reason, but none was given. Hodge was sullen. Maggie said she didn't know.

One day the news spread through the community that Maggie had a new baby. Old Doctor Wren said she made no secret about Sam Hodge being the father and asked him to file the birth certificate at the county seat: "Sam Hodge, Junior, son of Sam Hodge and Margaret Blake." That is what he did. Later my father told me that it was taken before the grand jury, but as there seemed to be no complaint from any one, they didn't know what to do about it, and so did nothing.

The child was born on a Monday. The following Sunday Maggie went to church as usual. She never failed to go to church. I was there with my parents. Everyone gasped except my father. I think he was amused. The preacher glowered at her, but made no reference to her presence. After church everyone scampered away instead of gathering in little groups as usual to talk. They were afraid Maggie might join one of the groups. She was very sociable. No one spoke to her, and very few looked at her. Those who did were hostile and tried to stare her out of countenance, but it couldn't be done. She returned their gaze as steadily as a calf and very much as a calf might. Her eyes were always smiling; so she was the picture of good health, good humour, and boundless friendliness. There was nothing brazen or combative about her attitude.

On the way home from church I heard the word, "illegitimate" for the first time. It aroused my curiosity. I wanted to see what an illegitimate child would look like. A boy brought up, as I had been, on a remote farm works out his own jumbled ideas on social laws. No odium attached to an illegitimate child in my mind at the time. Since only married people had children, it seemed to me quite a remarkable feat

Maggie had performed to produce a child without being married. So I slipped over there that afternoon to see it. Maggie welcomed me just as usual. I found no change of any kind in her. The baby cried when it waked, and she picked it up as though she were going to toss it into the air like a ball. She raised it above her head, then brought it to her breast and fed it.

"You've got a good appetite, Sam Hodge," she said. I winced when the name was pronounced, but I soon got over it. She always called the baby Sam Hodge. I examined this new and scandalous arrival with great care. There seemed to be nothing illegitimate about him. In spite of the fact that I had liked Howard Blake and didn't care about Sam Hodge one way or the other, this baby was beyond question adorable.

The following day I was sent to town to buy some supplies at the store. While I was there Maggie came in on a similar errand. The clerk started, then stiffened and stared. Maggie was smiling at him with her eyes and ordering "a side of bacon." The clerk was rummaging through such few ideas as had ever lodged in his head to determine whether he could sell a side of bacon to the mother of an illegitimate child. I don't think he decided that he could, but he was unable to think of any reason why he couldn't, so he reluctantly performed the task. By the time she had got down her list to coffee and soap, however, the shock was over, and the clerk was agreeable.

I have often wondered since then how much of just that sort of thing Maggie had to confront. She could scarcely avoid ten human contacts a month even though living far from the town and on her own farm. All of them must have been about the same as that with the grocer's clerk, and perhaps some of them were much worse. Whatever they were, Maggie never mentioned them, and I honestly believe, after years of mature deliberation, that they made no impression upon her whatever. I think she was glad to have another boy whether it was legitimate or not. Nature seemed to exact no penalty from her for the fulfilment of this desire, and if society wanted to, she was willing to let them enjoy it. There was another phase of her character at work for her defence also. Women simply did not exist for her. She

neither liked nor disliked them. They were blanks. Naturally they were the most aggressive in registering the outraged community's feelings. I do not believe she was ever able to grasp the idea of a man disapproving of her, or ever believed that one really did. I learned in later years that she had been very much petted by an adoring father. Her two elder brothers had been very good to her. She married young, and her relations with her husband had been perfect. I doubt if she had ever of her own experience found any serious obstacle to pleasant relations with any man she ever met. I know of several in that community who cheated on weights and measures and had to be bargained with very carefully, and I know that they did not try to cheat her.

The very dissimilar behaviour of Bessie and Maggie under the test taught me something that I remembered to my profit in many a trying situation. The issue of life and death was within themselves. Up to that time I had thought the community killed Bessie and that with the same circumstances the community was able to kill any human it chose to slay. I learned that so far from killing Maggie, it couldn't even bruise her. It is to be regretted that Maggie's victory cannot be attributed to a great intellectual achievement. That would be far more dramatic. But I suppose many victories have been gained by simply not thinking at all.

Maggie never asked Sam Hodge to help her; she needed no help. But Sam always felt that he ought to have undertaken the expense of the child. At first he feared it would be demanded of him. In his own mind he was preparing to resist. Then when no demand of any kind was made, remorse overtook him. He became more sullen than ever. I don't know why Sam didn't marry Maggie. Perhaps he won her too easily, and it frightened him. He probably expected the use of some pressure at first and was instinctively resisting in his own mind. Afterward, I feel sure, he regretted that he didn't marry her, not on moral grounds, but because he had let slip an opportunity to assure himself a happy life.

If Maggie had been silent and ashamed, it would have ruined her and protected him, but everyone knew she called the child Sam Hodge and that Sam had run away like a frightened dog. I have thought since, too, that if Sam had done very much for her, it would have been a serious injury

to her. As it was, one had to admire her pluck and independence.

When a fence was blown down or broken Maggie would not report it to her neighbour. She would go out and fix it herself. That act of consideration for their feelings cut deep. It is all very well to turn your back on someone, but if you discover that he is assisting you in a kindly and unobtrusive manner, your gesture is robbed of much of its meaning. The sting may be there for the other person, but certainly you can get no pleasure out of it.

The community was mystified by Maggie's knowledge of its sick list. No one talked to her any more, but she always knew who was sick. I suppose the farm hands told her. I still visited her sometimes, but I didn't tell her. It seemed humiliating to be helping people who hated her, and I wanted her to fight. In her sick visits she was considerate just as she was in other contacts. She would not go with things to eat that had to be presented. She would go quietly in and wash some clothes or scrub a floor. She could perform such tasks with astonishing rapidity. Those were real helps to sick housewives. Maggie was not winning her way back into the community's social life, but she was winning toleration. She continued to go to church, and I remember that her strong voice rose clear and good-natured above most of the others. She liked to sing, and it would be like her to sing a little more loudly than most other women. After a few months the scandal ceased to be news, and most persons forgot about it. One day when I visited Maggie I learned that several other young men also did. They were secretive about it, just as I was; but there was no change in her, so her company was as pleasant as ever. The pleasure of a visit haunted one, and I found it not easy to remain away a long time. There was a glow and thrill about those visits and something vitalizing and stimulating about coming in contact with so much health. Anywhere else gingerbread was just gingerbread, but at Maggie's house it seemed to burst out of the oven for sheer joy of living.

And then Godfrey Wickwire began to call on Maggie. He had a hardware store in the town. He used to ride out on his horse late in the afternoon. He called about twice a week, one visit usually being on Sunday afternoon. People

took an interest at once and secretly hoped that Maggie would soon be Mrs. Wickwire and eventually have a father for her two boys. They didn't say anything so pleasant and charitable, but they wished her good fortune in spite of themselves. Wickwire was about thirty years old; there was nothing remarkable about him, either bad or good. He was singularly devoted to hardware and knew his business. After five months of devoted attention in the form of regular visits Wickwire ceased to be seen in the neighbourhood. He was very much in love with Maggie. Wickwire had some depth of character; I don't think Hodge was capable of love, but Wickwire was. I think he wanted desperately to marry Maggie, but the sight of that baby whom she always called by the full name, Sam Hodge, probably was too much for him. At any rate, he struggled with himself for months and finally did not marry her. Nearly everyone was sorry. By this time Maggie had a lot of sympathy even if none of it was ever exhibited in her presence.

Then came another baby boy, and she again looked blandly at Doctor Wren and gave the name of the father, Godfrey Wickwire. This time feeling in the community was terrible. Probably a number of persons had said something charitable about Maggie in the preceding three months, and now she had made fools of them. Sentiment was much more intense than the first time. There was a little talk of having a committee call and ask her to leave. There can be no doubt about what would have happened if she had been a tenant farmer. But that was a day when private property was still sacred. To ask a person to get off his or her own land seemed very close to treason. If she had uttered so much as one cry for help, she would have been lost. The mob spirit was aroused, and they would have been on her like a pack of wolves. But she owed nobody anything. Everyone with whom she did business made a profit from the business. Even the men who bought the products of her farm merely assembled shipments and sold in larger markets. There was no one who could say he would withhold anything from her and thereby force her to leave. The women were hot for action, but the men could not see a place of beginning. Without expressing the thought, they were also aware of the fact that she never pursued men nor flaunted herself. That would

weigh heavily with men. I don't know whether it would with the women or not. Perhaps it would make them even more angry, since so few women have such power. She did not drink nor did she ever utter vileness. She was quick to laugh at a crude joke if it had any humour, but she told none. In a situation like this I have noticed that men like to move by indirection; they dislike facing the issue squarely, which is exactly what the women want them to do. They were looking for some indirect method, and there was none. Nothing would have saved her if she had owed any money at that time. They would have stripped her bare.

Very little was said about Wickwire, and I never heard of anything being said to him. The men in both instances were regarded as only remotely connected with the affair. A few persons had said Hodge ought to have married Maggie, but no one seemed to think Wickwire ought. In a very short time Wickwire went hunting; but it was his usual time to go hunting, so nothing was thought of it. Shortly after his return, however, he went on another long hunting trip. And I may as well finish with Wickwire here. For the remainder of his life he avoided women, though I think he could have married easily. He spent nearly all of his time hunting or fishing. In his younger days he always had one or more companions on these trips, but thereafter he seldom had a companion. They were as willing as ever to go, but he didn't want them. He neglected his business, and it ceased to grow with the community. Years later it was in the same one-story building, the only one-story building in the block; all the others grew to three stories except the bank on the corner, which was four.

The arrival of Godfrey Wickwire, Junior, seemed to affect Hodge even more than the arrival of his own child. Shortly thereafter he sold his equity in his farm. He reported that he had purchased a much larger and better place in another county. On the day of his departure he brought a span of mules and a good wagon loaded with sacks of oats to Maggie's farm and presented them to her very timidly. He was ashamed to face her. She accepted them quite cordially, just as a girl might say thank you for a box of candy. She seemed to have no particular feeling about the matter, either that he had made amends or made himself ridiculous. I

suspect that if he had cared to stay, she would have renewed the acquaintance just as if nothing had ever happened. I recall asking her if he saw his son. She said he did not. He didn't ask to see his son, and it did not occur to her to present him. Seeing the boy would probably have made Sam suffer. As for Maggie, it did not occur to her that Sam had any interest in the boy. She was proprietor of the children. I think she gave them their father's names partly from lack of inventiveness and partly from shameless frankness. It is indicative of her nature that there was no difficulty about asking her the details of Sam's visit. She told exactly what happened—and without comment. I have often thought that I never knew another person whose testimony equalled hers for accuracy. She never injected an opinion, bias, or prejudice. If the testimony was against herself, it came just as easily as any other part of the narrative. She had one characteristic inaccuracy in giving an account of anything, and that was to leave the women out entirely. She didn't seem to see them. No matter what they did, it made no impression on her mind. If you would lead the witness, however, she would check back to that point and tell you exactly what took place even though it were a recital of a woman's effort to break her spirit and kill her with shame. She would tell the story without feeling. It made no impression on her. She lived in a world of men, where she never had the slightest misgiving about her security.

I saw Maggie only twice in the year following the birth of Godfrey Wickwire, Junior. My responsibilities on the farm were growing heavier, and my interests were widening considerably as I grew into manhood. I was also spending much more time with books and seeking such opportunities as I could find for intellectual companionship. Moreover, I didn't approve of Maggie; but in spite of myself I still liked her in exactly the same way, and that fact caused some turmoil of spirit, which created the first rift in my feeling of closeness to her. I went away for three months to a little five-teacher college. Before I left I slipped over to say good-bye to her. She was the same cheery person. She was greatly interested in my search for learning, but said nothing about my long absence.

On my return, the first news I heard was that Maggie Blake had another baby. Another boy, and his name was Carl Stanton. There was one thing about Maggie's illegitimate children: they had fathers. What their fathers lacked in legality they certainly made up for in definiteness. None ever denied her right to use his name for the child. Stanton was a lawyer, about thirty-five years of age. There was not much business for a lawyer, but he owned a farm and seemed to be comfortable financially. I think Stanton decided he would be more clever than the preceding fathers. He married very shortly after the child was born, but he didn't marry Maggie. I learned afterward that he and the young lady to whom he became engaged about that time had a long talk on the subject of Maggie, and that she forgave him. Unfortunately, however, she was not content with forgiving him once; she continued to forgive him from time to time. Her generosity in this regard became irksome. Stanton was not happy in his home life. Then he adopted another course, which was probably carefully premeditated and approved as subtle strategy: he became a sort of pillar of respectability; he liked to talk to Bible classes or any other assemblage that would listen. And he began wearing a frock coat on formal occasions. He overdid the pose painfully and made himself ridiculous. All the while he was stupid enough to think he was handling his case much better than Hodge or Wickwire had handled theirs. To cap the climax, he ran for office, some petty county office that was usually the reward for personal popularity. As my father expressed it afterward, he didn't get enough votes to wad a shotgun. For the remainder of his life he could be counted on to join any new movement that came along. If a crowd bolted the county Democratic convention, he bolted with them. If someone started a new benevolent or fraternal society, he was the first to join. If there was a Jinks for Governor Club or Bryan for President Club proposed, he immediately gave his whole-hearted support. I do not think I have ever known a more pathetic figure in the life of a community.

In spite of my anger and some disgust, my sympathy went out to Maggie in her new affliction; I waited to see how hard it would go with her this time. Imagine my astonishment, if you can, when I learned that the whole community was

laughing. Maggie was at last beyond the pale even of scandal. Her performances had ceased to be an outrage and were now regarded as a habit. Nowhere did I hear any bitterness; no one suggested a committee. When she appeared in public, people smiled involuntarily and somewhat shyly, as though to say, "I'm trying not to hurt your feelings, but, really, you are so droll." And Maggie joined in their amusement with as much heartiness and as much readiness as she would have joined them in a foot race. She always relished a joke on herself just a little more than a joke on someone else.

I think Maggie had achieved just about what she felt she was honestly entitled to in being regarded as funny. She had always seemed amusing to herself. Whenever any one expressed admiration for her arm or leg, as I did several times in the old days when she and Howard and I were together, she would toss it out with a clumsy gesture and laugh, as much as to say: "Glad you like it, pal. All I've ever noticed is that it's big." I do not recall that she had any vanity. I suppose that was because she had never failed to please, and therefore had not felt it necessary to appraise, assemble, and mobilize her charms.

I went to see Maggie again, and she welcomed me as usual with gingerbread and buttermilk. To her I never grew up. I recall how clean and pretty the house was. The children were well behaved. She still called each boy by his father's full name, and they quite naturally called each other in the same way. She asked a great many questions about the little college, and said she wanted all the boys to go there if I recommended it.

I told her I had seen Hodge working on a farm near the college. He was employed as a labourer, probably at about ten dollars a month. I asked him what became of the money he got for his farm. He merely grunted. He had become more silent and sullen than ever. I think he indulged in a drunken orgy to exhaust the pent-up anguish of self-accusation and spent all his money.

In after years, whenever I came across the statement in print, "The woman always pays," I couldn't help thinking of Maggie and laughing. That doesn't prove that the statement isn't true, but it certainly was not in her case. Maggie

had other love affairs in the years that followed, but no more children. I twitted her about it one day, and she expressed sincere regret that she didn't have any more.

"The only trouble it ever caused me," she said, "was that I couldn't get enough to eat. I used to eat four or five times a day." Any other trouble it had caused her was by that time totally forgotten.

I used to try to find out if she realized what had happened to the fathers of her three illegitimate boys, but she didn't. Hodge's failure was accounted for by the unexplained loss of his money. Wickwire was "too fond of hunting to pay enough attention to his business." The change in Stanton which made him ridiculous she attributed to "fool notions" of his wife. Any one of them could have come to her for help and would have got it.

As we talked that day about Hodge and the little college I kept thinking of the ordeal that awaited those pretty, innocent, babbling children when they should face a public-school playground. I had heard my mother say so often, "What will become of those poor children?" that the thought became very painful to me as I sat among them and heard the music of their baby talk and frequent laughter. I wanted to beg Maggie to send them away; but it would have done no good, so I said nothing. I remembered a little boy whose life was made miserable in school because his father had been sent to the county jail for six months. But Maggie's luck descended to the boys also. Howard Blake, being the eldest, was first to go to school and he, of course, had no bar sinister. He was popular. As the others came on, he had prepared the way for them. They were his devoted admirers and followed him like shadows. I learned that jail was a perfectly understandable disgrace, but illegitimacy was not. Some of the children had been told not to play with the Blake boys, but no reason was given, and the order seemed unjust. The Blake boys had two tremendous assets that parental objection to their society could not overcome. They were good baseball players, and Maggie had the only apple orchard in that part of the state. The Blake boys were a power on any baseball team, and to avoid them was to lock oneself out of that irresistible apple orchard. I suppose it would have been very different if one of the children had been a girl.

Schoolboys are barbarians, but girls are cannibals. That phase of the problem rarely occurred to me, however, because it was scarcely possible to imagine Maggie Blake being the mother of a girl. Her children would inevitably be boys. Even the names of the boys caused no comment. Howard Blake came first; when Sam Hodge appeared, the boys took it for granted his name was Sam Hodge Blake. They always called him Sam Hodge, and I think many of them were under the impression it was one word. Godfrey Wickwire was an impossible name, and he became "Bunny" even before schooldays. Carl Stanton was called by his full name, but the words were run together as Sam Hodge had always been. The boys inherited Maggie's indifference to education. None went to the little college I had recommended.

During the Blake boys' schooldays other children were tortured because they had red hair or big freckles or queer clothes or because of some unfavourable publicity touching their parents; but the Blake boys never were. I happen to know that several children were spanked for being friendly with them, but the punishment failed of its purpose. The lure of baseball, apples, gingerbread, and good company was too strong. The boys who were whipped suppressed the news and failed to mend their ways.

Maggie still liked to go to the dances and fairs or any other public entertainment where she did not feel that she was intruding. She would frequently be accompanied home by from six to ten young men. As her sons grew to young manhood, they seemed to take the same delight in her company. None of the boys moved away. Farms were growing smaller by the time they were ready to marry, so she gave each a piece of land to settle on. Every one of her boys married in that community. I cannot properly say that they amounted to a great deal, but as that community judged success, they had a very fair measure of it.

They knew their fathers, but didn't pay much attention to them. I don't think the information interested them a great deal more than it interested Maggie herself. They had a full share of her indifference to social conventions. I choose the word indifference with care, because it was not contempt.

The town began to grow very rapidly when Howard Blake, Junior, was about twenty-one years old. Maggie would

talk enthusiastically on that subject, and several times told me that it was about the best community in the world and certainly deserved to grow.

The many new families coming both to farm and town offered to establish neighbourly relations with Maggie, and she always extended the delightful hospitality of her home. Some weeks or months later the newcomers would hear Maggie's life story. They didn't believe it. Having been taught all their lives what sort of women did such things, they could see for themselves that Maggie was not that sort. Bluff and hearty she was, to be sure, but not immoral. Well, they were right, in a way. Maggie wasn't immoral; she was unmoral.

The time came when there were more new settlers than old residents. Whenever I was asked about the story, I said I didn't know, until one day I heard my father reply to the same question, "She was a good neighbour for more than twenty years." That struck me as much better, so I adopted it. I suppose many others side-stepped in the same way. At any rate, the story of Maggie simply fell down. There were more people who didn't believe it than did.

One of the strangest phases of the controversy about Maggie (it was waged for some three years between the newcomers who liked her and the older residents who felt she should be ostracized) was that none of the newcomers ever asked her directly to explain her children's names, and none of the older residents was clever enough to prove his or her story by Maggie's own testimony. She would not have denied it. Neither would any of the boys; but they were not asked, even after her death.

I have never known of another case in which Bacon's comment on death was so strikingly proved true. It was he who said, "Death closeth the door to envy and is a passport to good fame."

There was a little creek which ran through our pasture and Maggie's. Usually it was about ten feet wide, but sometimes it disappeared. After a heavy rain it became a torrent fifty yards wide and tore down fences. There was a cloudburst in the hills upstream the year Carl Stanton was married. He was then twenty years of age. As the country became more thickly settled, people had encroached on the bed of

this innocent-looking stream. After the cloudburst it became half a mile wide in some places. Houses, barns, wagons, and fences were tumbling along its boiling waters, together with pigs, goats, sheep, horses, and cows. This strange and fearful procession was moving through Maggie's pasture at an astonishing speed when she saw a little boy about six years old clinging to the top of what remained of his home. Maggie waded into the water at once. Those who saw her said she was swept away before she had reached a depth of four feet. She and the child were both drowned. Their bodies were washed ashore together at a bend in the creek in our pasture.

Having accepted their mother's ostracism all their lives, the boys prepared for a funeral at which they would be the only mourners. But the procession to the cemetery was more than a mile long. It was now absolutely safe for the first time to make public confession of that love for Maggie which all felt and which had tortured them through all the years when they bowed to their duty to hate her. There was something inexpressibly pathetic in the fact that Maggie had done the community such a signal service by her death. At last a burden was lifted from their hearts. They could henceforth claim her memory as they had never been able to claim her. It was now perfectly clear that she had caused them much more anguish than they had ever caused her.

For a long time I had wanted to find out exactly how the boys estimated their mother, aside from the fact that they loved her devotedly. It was some months after the funeral that I had an opportunity to talk with Howard Blake for a whole afternoon.

"Mother was elemental, like the weather or the moon," he said. "I never judged her at all. Whatever she did was inevitable, without plan or design. You couldn't quarrel with her ideas, because she was not conscious of having a philosophy of life. Yet she had as definite a philosophy as the world has ever known. Her utter lack of self-consciousness was her strength. All her life she gave and never asked anything. We boys loved her for the same reason and in very much the same way that you did. She won our love as honestly as any stranger might. She never claimed it as a

mother's due. She took it by the very simple method of giving us her love so abundantly."

I have since known many famous women, good, bad, powerful, wise, or brilliant, but she remains the most remarkable personality I have ever encountered. I doubt if she had either education or imagination enough to enjoy a dime novel. I am not certain that she knew long division. But this I do know of her: she was incapable of envy, malice, or revenge. Her sublime faith in men was never diminished. I do not believe she was ever worried, even for a minute. The only unfulfilled wish I ever heard her express was for more babies. Such a person would quite naturally be able to perform miracles, and Maggie certainly performed one. She practised something akin to polyandry in a strictly orthodox, puritanical, farming community for more than a decade, named three illegitimate sons after their fathers, wrecked all three of the fathers, flourished as probably no green bay tree ever dreamed of flourishing, and finally in her mature years chased those who wanted to tell the truth about her to evasion, silence, or actual falsehood.

RACHEL AND HER CHILDREN

By FRANCES NEWMAN

From *American Mercury*

EVERYONE agreed that a perfect stranger could not have seen Mrs. Foster's funeral without realizing that Mrs. Foster had lived a well-rounded life. There was her husband in the front pew, vainly struggling to conceal his grief so that he could console Mrs. Foster's mother, old Mrs. Overton. There were her two sons, vainly struggling to conceal their grief so that they could console Mrs. Foster's daughters-in-law, their wives. There were her four little grandchildren, as downcast as any one could ask. There were her six faithful servants, as heartbroken as her daughters-in-law. The society of Colonial Dames was there, in a body, and the Daughters of the Confederacy were there in a body. The Woman's Club was there, in a body, and even the Chamber of Commerce was there, in a body. There was all of the Social Register which did not happen to be on its yachts, or in sanatoria, or abroad. And there were the wreaths, and the harps, and the crescents, and the sheaves of all those bodies and of all those personages.

The hearts of the community went out to every member of Mrs. Foster's stricken family, so the rector told his audience and his God. But in particular it went out to Mrs. Foster's mother, for not a month before she had stood by her only son's open grave, and now she was about to stand beside her only daughter's open grave. She sat among them in the church—as the rector said, like Rachel weeping for her children. But she was veiled in English crêpe of excellent quality and so the most acute eyes of the community could not count the number of her tears. It was fortunate, indeed, that Mr. Foster could afford that excellent quality of crêpe,

for old Mrs. Overton was not actually weeping like Rachel—in fact, she was not weeping at all.

Old Mrs. Overton had dreamed indirectly of Mrs. Foster's funeral on at least a hundred different nights. Thus she had now no difficulty in realizing that her brilliant daughter's mortal remains were reposing in that gray coffin which was so magnificently concealed by its blanket of lilies and pink roses. Old Mrs. Overton was seventy-four years old; she belonged to a generation which believed that dreaming of a funeral was a sign of a wedding, and that dreaming of a wedding was a sign of a funeral. She had never read the works of Dr. Siegmund Freud—she had, in fact, never heard of Dr. Freud—and so she had no idea what Dr. Freud's disciples would have entered on the card describing her case. Old Mrs. Overton sat comfortably in the best corner of the cushioned pew and, in the pleasant shelter of her well-draped veil, thought about things.

She thought of the time when she was sixteen, back in 1864. She thought of Captain Ashby, with his black plume and his black horse. They had stood in the box garden, and she had fairly ached with adoration of his six feet, his black hair, his black eyes, of the wound in some vaguely invisible spot that no Southern lady could even think about, of his gallant war record, not yet embalmed in the Confederate Museum. She was familiar with the works of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray and Sir Walter Scott, but she had never been allowed to read the story of Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester. She flutteringly expected . . . she flutteringly hoped . . . that one night soon, perhaps that very night, Captain Ashby would drop on his gray-trousered knees, and implore her to do him the great honour of becoming his wife. She would accept the great honour, she would beg him not to kneel before one so unworthy, and Captain Ashby would rise. He would timidly bend down and kiss her respectfully on the forehead. And then Captain Ashby and his betrothed would walk in to his betrothed's father, and Captain Ashby would ask her hand in marriage. That was what Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray led one to expect, and that was what her mother, who had been twice married and therefore twice engaged, led her to expect.

But that was not what happened. Captain Ashby stopped

talking. Even eager questions about his recent heroic deeds were barely answered. The moment might be approaching. Sally had no desire to postpone it, and so she stopped asking the eager questions. Captain Ashby seized her in a passionate embrace, he covered her face with passionate kisses, he kissed her under her soft chin, and just below the brown curls on her neck. It was instantly obvious to Sally that Captain Ashby did not love her. Ivanhoe would never have kissed the fair Rowena like that; David Copperfield would never have kissed the angelic Agnes like that, or even Dora who could not keep her accounts straight. Sally's heart was broken. She tore herself from the embrace of this man who had proved that he did not love her by kissing her, she rushed into her father's house, and up the stairs to her own four-poster. She wept there until her mother came to find her, and to hear the tragic tale. And her mother, though she had been twice married and twice engaged, confirmed Sally's belief that she had been insulted. And Captain Ashby rode away on his black horse.

Mrs. Overton sighed a little under the crêpe veil. She had waited six months for the black horse to gallop back up the avenue between the magnolias, but it had been years before she discovered that a kiss before proposal did not necessarily insult a great love. Meanwhile, her mother had decided to marry her to a certain Colonel Overton, and had had no great difficulty in overcoming Colonel Overton's intention of being legally faithful to the memory of his Julia. Sally's heart, of course, was broken, but that was no reason for being a forlorn old maid, and she thought it would be rather pleasant to decide for herself what frock she would wear, and whether she would go to the Springs in the summer, and how she would do her hair. Elderly husbands were said to be tractable, and Sally had been very tired of talking only when Mama didn't want to talk, or only to people Mama didn't want to talk to, and of always sitting with her back to the horses like an inconsequential Prince Consort. She had been convinced that the dignity of marriage would offset its disadvantages, and, besides, she had no very clear idea of marriage except that it meant a change of name and of residence, and sitting at the head of one's own table, behind one's own silver tea service. People hardly talked then of the boredom

of sitting at the other end of the table from the wrong man every morning; certainly they never talked of the occasions when there wasn't a table between one and the wrong man.

The choir was singing "Lead, Kindly Light," which had been Mrs. Foster's favourite hymn, and which, she always mentioned, was written by the late Cardinal Newman before he became a Catholic, much less a Cardinal. Old Mrs. Overton shivered a little under her veil when they came to

> And with the morn those angel faces smile
> That I have loved long since and lost awhile.

Mrs. Overton had no doubt that Mama, tulle cap, black bombazine, and all, and Colonel Overton, beard, temper, and all, would be smiling among those angels, and the idea was not cheering. She had been an old man's darling, but she had also been an old man's slave, a carefully treasured harem of one. Colonel Overton had been fond of saying, of declaiming, that he did not believe in the honour of any man, or the virtue of any woman. Sally had never thought of deceiving him even about the price of a new gown, but even if she had been the most abandoned creature she would have been saved in spite of herself. When she went to a dentist, Colonel Overton was beside her. When she bought a new hat, Colonel Overton was there to protect her from the shop's manager and also from an unbecoming bonnet. Sally had never danced even the Virginia Reel or the Lancers after the morning when Colonel Overton had confirmed her idea of respectful proposals by asking the honour of her hand in marriage and then kissing her chastely on the brow.

Now she looked at the lilies and pink roses that concealed Mrs. Foster's coffin under their expensive fragrance. She was thinking of the day Mrs. Foster was born—something less than a year after the respectful proposal. It was not a coincidence that the baby, now a corpse, had been christened Cornelia for the maternal grandmother whose capacity for being obeyed she had inherited. Mrs. Overton's mother had not waited to receive a namesake with that pleased surprise which ordinarily greets namesakes and proposals and legacies. She had taken the name for granted, quite audibly,

on the day when a granddaughter's probable advent was announced to her. The younger Cornelia had justified her grandmother. She allowed her mother to sit in her own carriage facing her own horses, and she allowed her to continue filling her own cups with tea and coffee from her own silver urn. That was the correct thing, and Cornelia always did the correct thing, in all matters from sleeves and shoes to husbands and religions. But after Cornelia was four years old, her mother was never allowed to talk to the people she wanted to talk to about the things she wanted to talk about —not even when her husband permitted her the luxury of an unchaperoned feminine visit. And when Colonel Overton very unwillingly died, Cornelia had seen that her mother was faithful to his memory.

Cornelia was nineteen when that event took place, and just in the process of marrying herself to a rising young lawyer named Henry Foster. The marriage took place shortly afterward, with a simple elegance which the newspaper notices attributed to the recent bereavement in the bride's family. But the simplicity of the elegance at Cornelia's marriage was really due to the disappearance of the late colonel's prosperity rather than to the disappearance of the late colonel himself. His wife and his daughter and his son knew that their acquaintances attributed part of this disappearance to the colonel's extraordinary gratitude to a prepossessing coloured—just barely coloured—nurse, who had been the comfort of his declining years. But Mrs. Overton had never been so indiscreet as to mention this theory to her daughter, even on the most tempting occasions.

Mrs. Overton had been as faithful to her husband as her sex required in the days when a good woman had no history except that recorded in the parish register. Her husband, she supposed, had been no more faithful to her than his sex will continue to require until nature changes her ways. But her daughter was inexpressibly shocked when she began to show signs of considering a second alliance.

Mrs. Overton, at that time, was still sufficiently under forty not to have begun comparing the corners of her eyes and the line under her chin with those of her contemporaries. The aspiring Mr. Robinson was not an Overton, but the war had

been over long enough for prosperous Robinsons and impoverished Overtons to marry each other without scandal. Mrs. Overton would have liked to sit behind her own silver tea service again, and in her own drawing room, and Mr. Robinson would have been so honoured by the gift of her hand in marriage that she would at last have been able to talk to the people she wanted to talk to about the things she wanted to talk about. But Cornelia disapproved of second marriages so positively that people who did not know her might well have thought she was sorry that she had been born. Cornelia was then expecting the birth of that son who was now trying to conceal his own grief so that he could console her first daughter-in-law. And Cornelia had been thrown into such a state by her mother's announcement that Mrs. Overton had felt obliged to give up the idea.

So she had continued to sit on the side of her daughter's table for nine months of every year, and on the side of her son William's table for three months of every year. Even when tea services on breakfast tables went out, and round tables came in, tables continued to have a head and a side, and Mrs. Overton had continued to grieve for her own tea service and her own table. She had never ceased to long for a house where a ringing telephone would mean that someone in the world wanted to talk with her badly enough to go through the trouble of getting a telephone number; where a ringing door bell would mean that someone wanted to see her, if it were only a book agent, or the laundry man.

For thirty-four years Mrs. Overton had spoken to Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of the Confederacy and newspaper reporters and officers of those clubs which seem to exist chiefly to elect officers. But she had spoken only to tell them that Mrs. Foster was lunching or dining or presiding at some house or some club where she either could or could not be called to the telephone. She had talked to a great many callers, but she had talked to callers of no consequence, while Mrs. Foster talked to callers of great consequence—local, if not international. And then Mrs. Foster had fallen ill. And William Overton had fallen ill. And old Mrs. Overton began to be Rachel weeping for her children.

Mrs. Foster was ill, desperately ill, for six months. For

their convenience, if not for hers, the doctors decreed that Mrs. Foster must be in a hospital, and that she must receive no visitors. Old Mrs. Overton suffered with her daughter, but she revived the pleasant old custom of pouring the breakfast coffee from her own silver urn, and Mr. Foster was delighted. She carried the pantry keys, and the silver-closet keys, and the linen-room keys; she went to market alone; she went shopping alone. All the ladies of high position, and all the officers of all Mrs. Foster's clubs came to call on Mrs. Overton—to ask about Mrs. Foster, of course, but even on such occasions other subjects are discussed, and Mrs. Overton must be cheered and strengthened for the ordeal she was undergoing. Then William Overton was mercifully released from his sufferings. And then Mrs. Foster was mercifully released from her longer sufferings.

Old Mrs. Overton had received hundreds of notes. She had scores of callers, and she had felt herself able to receive them all—decorously, in her own bedroom, one or two at a time. Her fortitude was considered remarkable. She had ordered delicate lunches for the faithful friends who were downstairs receiving the wreaths and the sheaves of Mrs. Overton's other friends and of all her societies. And she had ordered her own veil of the best English crêpe.

The choir was singing "Asleep in Jesus," and Mrs. Foster's funeral was nearly over. Mrs. Overton began to look about a little, under the shadow of her veil. She was thinking of all the visitors she would have the next day and the next week; of the days the granddaughters-in-law and the great-grandchildren would spend with her, of the birthday party she would give for little Cornelia in the spring—Mrs. Foster would want her namesake to have the party she had promised her. She was thinking of all the people who would beg her and Mr. Foster to come and have dinner with them, very quietly—since they, too, had loved Mrs. Foster.

And then Mrs. Overton happened to look across the aisle at Mrs. Turner, and Mrs. Turner was looking beyond her at Mr. Foster. Mrs. Turner's look was only a decorous look of heartfelt sympathy, but Mrs. Overton suddenly felt cold and forlorn. She remembered how attentive Mrs. Turner had been to her and to Mr. Foster. And she remembered that

Mrs. Turner had lost Mr. Turner three years before. And she remembered how many of the kind women who had come to cheer her for her great ordeal, who had received the flowers that were banked about the chancel, had lost their husbands three or four or five years before. She remembered the statistics of the number of widows in the state that she had read for one of Mrs. Foster's erudite club papers. The whole church, the whole world, seemed to be filled with widows—widows whose daughters would not discourage their mothers from taking names different from their own.

Mrs. Overton had no doubt that in a year she would go back to the side of another Mrs. Foster's table, that she would receive telephone messages for another Mrs. Foster—and that this Mrs. Foster would not even be her daughter.

The last prayer was over. The eight eminent pallbearers were gathering. Mr. Foster rose and offered his arm to his mother-in-law. Mrs. Overton stood up, shaking with bitter sobs, and took the offered arm. She walked up the aisle behind the blanket of lilies and pink roses that covered Mrs. Foster's coffin. All the hearts of the community went out to old Mrs. Overton, weeping like Rachel for her children.

URIAH'S SON

By STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

From *Red Book*

CERTAIN stories have a way of repeating themselves: the transfer of Naboth's vineyard turns up in the real-estate columns; the steel-and-concrete walls of a modern Jericho crumble at the blast of the strong man's trumpet; a businesslike Jacob in a battered derby tricks a hungry Esau into signing away his rightful inheritance on the dotted line. Life may have more possible permutations than a hand of cards, but certain combinations recur—only sometimes the sleight of circumstance provides a new and unexpected ending to an ancient gambit. It was so with David Davenant and Frances Jerome.

David, king over Israel, was a strong, cunning, diverse man. So was David Davenant—and a little king in the New York of his day, as well. As for Frances—no, the sumptuous beauty of Bathsheba, pale and burning, was hardly hers, though she *was* beautiful. She was kind, forgiving, and gentle, with cool hands and a delicate gaiety when she was pleased—the kind of woman life seems to delight in forcing into traps that would break the strong.

Everybody expected her to marry badly—for she had what people considered a terrible weakness for taking care of crippled things. So everybody was disappointed—most favourably, of course—when she married Dicky Jerome.

Dicky was your fortunate youth, *par excellence*—you know the school legend—the life of the party, the man who can arrive as late as he pleases, anywhere, and always be more than forgiven. He was handsome in his youth, without a trace of slickness—the pleasantest of company—dogs adored him—success came rubbing against his legs like an affectionate cat. Life had no corners for him, as it had for David

Davenant. Why he ever picked out Frances—but he did, to the temporary discomfiture of the prophets, who had to fall back upon the comment that poor Frances sometimes seemed a little dazed with her own good fortune. They had been married three years, and had a son who looked absurdly like Dicky from the first—that Dicky's first child should be a son was as much to be expected as that it should be spoken of as Dicky's son—and everybody knew how well Dicky was doing with D. Davenant and Co.—when David Davenant came to the Jeromes' for dinner one night.

His coming was not quite as much of an individual triumph for Dicky's luck as it sounds. After all—David Davenant had known Frances' father—and David was famous for keeping rather uncanny track of the private affairs of his brilliant young men. But for all that, Frances must have been rather excited about that evening. As for Dicky, who never was nervous—the evening must have made him believe more firmly than ever in his peculiar star.

You can see Frances, shy and anxious—a gentle kitten being modestly polite to a king, whenever opportunity offered, which was seldom, for Dicky carried the brunt of the conversation with his usual aplomb. And David—looking at Frances—and looking again!

What could it have been in Frances that stirred such intense and ruthless purpose in the heart of a dour, self-sufficient man some twenty years older than herself? A gaunt lion, staring enchanted at a spray of spring cherry blossoms—a cold king, stung to the soul by beauty demure as a child's, unconscious as a child's. But it happened—and Frances, I think, did not even know it was happening, in spite of what people said later. The king came to dinner oftener—the other brilliant young men began to watch Dicky with wary eyes. One wonders if David of Israel ever went to dinner at the Uriahs'—and if the captains of his host were envious and said that Uriah had all the luck.

Modern kings manage these affairs a little less crudely, perhaps, than their forbears did. The blue envelope has supplanted the executioner's sword. So David did not set Dicky in the forefront of the battle and bid his companions retire from him that he might die. Instead he raised Dicky's salary and sent him on a trip of investigation to Cholopan.

White women with young children do not go to Cholopan if they want to live—or did not, then; and even the strictest living of white men used to come back shaken. As for the other white men, they did not last long. Dicky did not last long.

A year and a half after his death, Frances married David Davenant. Then the whispers began. The kindest said that he must have terrified her into it, and told tales of the implacable, bearish strength that had always got him the thing he desired. Or else, that of course it was for the child, poor thing, and they pitied her. Indeed, Dicky's death had left her in actual poverty; it is really astonishing how much it costs for even the most fortunate of pleasant young men to maintain a home in a properly agreeable way. As for what the more malicious agreed about the whole affair—but why bother with them? The one point on which all were agreed was that Frances certainly had no right to seem at all happy in her second marriage. And she did seem—not unhappy, at least—at first.

David must have reckoned that a king could crush such gossip like a snapping little animal under his heel, by mere strength. But gossip is fog that comes seeping in through the tiny cracks of existence—seeping in and in, no matter how firmly one tries to stuff the cracks.

As it was, he broke one twenty-year friendship in the first months of his marriage—when Rufus Malone, who feared neither God nor David, greeted him one day with: "Well, David—and how is the fair Bathsheba to-day?" David turned on his heel and never spoke to the man again. The incident made more gossip—and after that, David may have thought, with some wisdom, that the best thing to do was to wait and let the gossip wear out with time. But Frances wore out first.

She died four years after her second marriage—taking leave of life as gently and civilly as she had always taken leave of her friends. And the friends who had thought her first apparent happiness unseemly were satisfied, for when she died, she had certainly not been what the world calls happy for a long time. The gossip had reached her and touched her—and some natures cannot endure a lifelong warfare with fog. Toward the last, I think, she lived wholly for her boy—but

she must have trusted David, or she could not have borne it to leave the boy alone with him. He was seven or so when she died—a handsome, charming child, a little delicate, with his father's graces of manner.

So Frances' story ended—and the prophets of her world were satisfied—for their prophecies had been fulfilled at last.

As for David, who had grimly adored her and loaded her docile fragility with gifts so properly kingly, they weighed her down like golden armour—no one knew if or what he suffered, or with what private agony of iron tears he tried to buy off Death. Kings have no time for long grief, and he went on—only something seemed to shut up in his mind with a click of steel. If he had been grim before, he was grimmer now—the rare, odd, awkward tenderness he had sometimes shown with Frances, the strange occasional attempts at light-heartedness, as at the playing of an unaccustomed game—these disappeared. His hair whitened; he grew leaner—but his mind retained the relentless precision of a strong machine—and D. Davenant and Co. prospered till few competitors dared stand in its shadow.

After a while men began to say jokingly that he would never die—unless, they added, half-believing it, the Devil flew away with him. For even after Frances' death, he displayed no slightest sign of repentance for what he had done—though, by now, his story, and Frances', and Dicky Jerome's, had well nigh taken on the proportions of a legend—and people called him "King David," under their breath.

Then, as the boy grew up, there began to be talk about "King David" and "Uriah's son."

Frank Jerome's first real memory of his stepfather was one of fear. A gaunt figure stalking about the tiny apartment where Frances had gone to live after Dicky's death—a figure so tall and strange and with such a frightening air of power about it that Frank always felt that he and his mother and the apartment lived only on sufferance in its presence—that, if it wished, it could stamp with its foot like a lanky master magician and crumple the neat little rooms to pieces like a house of cards. A gaunt face coming close to him, the eyes staring at him unblinkingly, seeming to count and judge every childish mistake without mercy or comprehension—knotty, powerful hands, bestowing mysterious parcels of toys that

were wonderful enough in themselves, but took a long time to get used to, because they, too, had an air of power and condescension from which he shrank.

Then the house on Riverside Drive—vast and gloomy, dark curtains, soft funereal carpets—and the first terrors of finding the gaunt figure unexpectedly there, at meals, following his mother about like a tall, overpowering shadow, asking penetrating questions for which there were no right answers, horrifically seated, smoking a gaunt cigar in rooms that had begun to seem a little familiar—everywhere!

The child can really have seen very little of David those first years—but the presence of him obsessed his days. And when he was told about God, he made Him in David's image—a gaunt figure in white robes, spiky-crowned, appallingly just and omnipresent, striding the floors of heaven with a pitiless eye alert.

Then the memories grew brighter and clearer—his mother's death, the numb, uncomprehending shock, the gaunt figure with its face set and rigid, saying, "Frances! Frances!" in a harsh, dull voice—his mother, smiling tinily: "Take care of your father, Frank!" But David wasn't his father—and as for taking care of him—Frank would as soon have thought of trying to take care of God.

A strange life, after that, for the two of them in the huge, melancholy house. Nurses and governesses—the servants—days and weeks when David hardly seemed to see the little boy who played in the corner. Did David hate him, or was it merely with bleak indifference that the deep eyes regarded him and his games? He didn't know. But he began to think that David hated him, after the incident of the closet under the stairs.

Frank hated the stairs and the black and cavernous hall. Sinister shadows lurked there in the long, gray winter afternoons—dark, faceless shapes of shadow, ready to catch at a little boy's feet. And the closet under the stairs was their most secret fastness.

Perhaps David noticed this aversion of Frank's, with those bleak eyes that seemed to see nothing and everything. At any rate, one afternoon, when they were alone, he spoke: "Frank."

"Yes, sir."

"I left a box of cigars in the closet under the stairs. Go and get it for me, please."

The request left Frank aghast. Why, even the lights in the hall were not on yet—not that they helped much! The hall was packed with shadows.

"Well, Frank? What's the matter?"

"N-nothing."

"What's the matter?"

"C-can't I ask Miss Tyler? I——"

"Frank, are you afraid? Afraid of the dark?" The gaunt face stiffened—the last words were a delicate lash of scorn.

"Y-yes!"—defiantly.

The set visage relaxed a trifle. "Why? There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing will hurt you."

But he didn't know. How could he know? Even the shadows would be afraid of *him*.

"Frank, go and get that box."

Slowly, rebelliously, Frank turned to face the shadows. There were even more of them than he had feared. But he could feel David's eyes on his back, burning. He caught his breath and walked straight into the heart of the darkness.

"On the second shelf, Frank."

He wanted to grab with icy hands and run back, but he could not. If he did he would be ashamed in the sight of those hateful eyes. He found the box, and turned, trembling, to face the terrible shadows again. Why—they were only shadows! Just ordinary shadows! He gasped with astonishment—and walked back slowly—even dallying a little, in fearful defiance.

After that, he could not afford to be afraid of the closet, for he never knew when David might send him there again. But at times he felt quite sure that David had hated him, and had been disappointed that he had not failed in the cruel adventure. That, more than anything else, helped him to conquer his fear. And then he felt more certain than ever that David hated him, for a month or so after the incident, David suddenly informed him that he was to be sent away to school.

He didn't want to go to school—it meant discomfort, change, a whole host of possible terrors. But being his father's son, when he got to school, he prospered—he had

that indefinable engagingness that, in man or woman, makes the run of mankind follow the proverb and give to him that hath. He had his father's facility—his father's ease. And his school and college life could easily have been like his father's, a pleasant, triumphal passage through an admiring throng. But it was not—because of David.

David did not fit in at all with the admiring throng. Indeed, he seemed often to grudge what success his stepson had, and certainly never praised him. Coming back to David, on vacations, was like stepping from a warm room under the freezing needles of a shower-bath. After a while Frank learned to brace and inure himself against that shock. The fact that David certainly disliked him, very possibly hated him, became merely a fact—a weight to carry, but not a crushing weight, for, oddly enough, Frank could never find the flicker of meanness or spite in those deep and hostile eyes. He knew what some of his friends thought of David's attitude but he could not agree with them. The hate that was set against him was a superb hate. It had an iron quality. He strove against it as against a bar of iron—and grew strong.

David gave him a ridiculously tiny allowance, considering, but he lived within it rigidly, contracting none of the pleasant debts of some of his classmates. He would not give David the opportunity for easy scorn such debts might afford. He played football for four years on the scrub team, knowing perfectly well that he had no chance for a letter—but he would not give up the game and hear David's voice: "So you've given up football, Frank?" and see the thought in his mind: "I thought you couldn't stick it out."

It must not be understood that his youth was either doleful or priggishly self-centred—it was not. He enjoyed himself greatly and was well liked; but under the surface of his days lay a certain backbone of purpose, rare among his fellows. When he was graduated, he received no votes for "most popular man," but he had, without knowing it, the respect of his entire class.

The war came when he was twenty-one, in his last year of college. David wrote a characteristic letter. "So you intend to enlist in the Marines. Considering your training, and the scarcity of officer material, you would probably be rather more useful if you tried for an officers' training camp

—but I realize that the job for which a man is best suited is seldom the one that appeals to him. Besides, as a private, you would have much less responsibility—which is always pleasanter." The unit Frank had intended to join went overseas without him. He went to camp and spent his war service training recruits in Texas. But the recruits were well trained—even David would have admitted that.

After the war he came back to the house on Riverside Drive, and David frigidly offered him a chance with D. Davenant and Co. "You realize that, though the other men may not think so at first, you will be treated exactly like any other employee. Your success, should you make it, you will have to make yourself. I have never played favourites."

Frank smiled. "Of course, sir." At last they were coming to grips.

"In fact," said David, doubtfully, "—don't grin at me, Frank!—it will probably be a little harder for you than the ordinary man. Your superiors will be informed that you need expect no private favours from me——"

"Very well, sir."

"Very well. You will report at the office in the morning. I shall, naturally, discontinue your allowance, but you may live here if you prefer it."

"I'll pay you rent."

"Don't be nonsensical," said David, contemptuously.

"Then I'll live somewhere else."

A gleam lighted David's eyes.

"As you please. However, in that case—if you wish to stay here—you may pay me the average rent my clerks pay." He named figures.

"Very well."

Frank had been working six months when he made the discovery. Gossip sleeps—but it does not die. He overheard the office whispers behind his back—the whispers that called him Uriah's son. So he came to know, at last.

When he was quite sure, and the first bitterness was still upon him, he went to David. It was after a dinner as silent as most of their meals together. The interview took place in the vast, funereal room whence David had sent him out that time to look for the cigar box in the closet under the stairs. David had just lighted one of that same brand of cigars.

"I want to talk to you, sir."

"Well, Frank? Getting tired of the grind?"

"No. I want to ask you some things about my father."

The knotty fingers of David's hand clenched suddenly about his cigar. Then, gradually, they unclosed. "I've spoiled my cigar," he said, in a musing voice. He took another cigar from the box, clipped, lighted it. Then he turned to Frank.

"So? Well?"

Frank told him what he had heard. As David failed to reply, sitting stiff in his chair, the accusing voice grew more passionate. There was nothing young about that voice any longer—the heat in it was the heat of a deep, steady flame, too white-hot to sputter or roar.

When Frank was quite done, the composed figure stirred a little.

"Well? Is that all?"

"You don't deny it?"

"No," said the quiet image, "I don't deny it."

Frank passed his hand over his forehead with an odd, mechanical gesture. He had expected raging denial—mountainous anger—lies that stuck in the throat—anything but this quietude. He could hardly believe his own accusation, even now. There had been hate between them before—strong hate—but nothing like this, nothing crawling. He looked at David as a child might look at a monster. A sudden horror seized him—a horror that, if he looked long enough, he might see blood upon David's hands—and he shook.

"You don't deny it?" he repeated, stupidly.

"No," came the quiet answer again. "I don't deny it. Your father was worthless and useless——"

"You liar! Oh, I've heard! He was——"

"Worthless and useless. He crossed me—I put him out of my way. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to kill you, I think," said Frank; and he believed it—then.

"Well," said the figure, with a certain horrible mockery, "as you will. I've lived a long time."

The hands that were almost at David's throat dropped away.

"No," said Frank, in a cracking voice, "that wouldn't be enough. I'd rather have everybody know what you are—and they will. I'll put you in jail for my father's murder, if it takes me——"

"It would be like your father's son," said David, "to dirty your mother's memory—if he could."

"You devil!" said Frank, half sobbing. He pressed his hands against his eyes.

David carefully extinguished his cigar.

"If you are quite through——" he said.

"No," said Frank, and this time the eyes that looked into David's eyes were calm as his own. "I can't kill you—I can't disgrace you—but I *can* break you. You don't care about God or death or disgrace—but you care about D. Davenant and Company! And I'll break D. Davenant and Company! I think that would hurt you more than anything else."

"Try it," said David Davenant, and rose to his feet. He laughed. "If you were *my* son—perhaps. But not the son of your father. He was worthless and useless—and you are too much like him. It would take a strong man to break me, Frank—not you."

"You lie," said Frank, steadily. "You were afraid of my father. You murdered him because you were afraid. You could because he trusted you. But I know you—and you sha'n't murder me—and I'll break you."

"Try it," said David Davenant again, and walked out of the room.

Hot resolutions cool between night and morning, as a rule. The next morning Frank's resolution had not cooled, but he began to realize the enormous difficulty of his task.

He realized it even more in the next few months. But when a man is willing to work twenty-four hours a day for a purpose, and subordinate everything else in life to that purpose, he either breaks himself or accomplishes his task.

The first step took him two hard and discouraging years. But the time had long been ripe in the trade for an organized fight of the independents against D. Davenant and Company, and Frank found himself at last a small but growingly important figure in the forces preparing for that fight.

Luck helped him somewhat, but not more than it generally helps the man who bullies rather than beseeches it. And the fires of his purpose never had time to grow cold, for whenever they sank down a little, his path and David's would cross. After a time he began to suspect that David, in his kingly way, was keeping very close track of him, and the suspicion tightened his grip on his weapons. David was watching for a slip—he must make no slips.

There was the incident of Mrs. Dixon, for instance. Mrs. Dixon was, to the eye, merely a comely, rather flirtatious young widow with a certain quite pleasant foolishness about her. Frank liked her. They told stories about her, of course—and some not very nice ones; but they told stories about everyone. She had never been actually touched by scandal; and if she lived rather expensively and maintained a discreet silence about the presumably defunct Mr. Dixon—that was her own affair.

Frank's friendship with her was progressing very pleasantly when, one evening as they were dining together in a restaurant whose reputation leaned toward the indiscreet, David came in, alone, and sat down at the table opposite them.

It spoiled an agreeable dinner party; Mrs. Dixon's sallies began to seem vapid or a little too eager. Frank kept looking at David, who did not seem to observe him. But Frank knew he did. He could hear David's voice—"like your father—worthless—useless——" Frank and David exchanged no words, but the dinner ended in unacknowledged discord. Nor did Frank accept Mrs. Dixon's carefully casual invitation to stop in at her apartment for a last cigarette before he went home. After that, their friendship lapsed, in spite of Mrs. Dixon's letters. When the Harcourt scandal broke next year, Frank was just as glad that he had not answered those letters. If David had not come that evening—David might have triumphed. So David's wariness had done him a bad turn, for once. But that wariness kept on.

There were other incidents like that of Mrs. Dixon—other unexpected meetings with David in the flesh, a dour figure watching with terrible persistence for Frank to stumble and fall. And David in the spirit was always watching. "Just like your father," the phantom said—and Frank buckled to

and disproved him—or rather proved him wrong in a different way—for it came to seem to him as if every mistake he made counted doubly, against himself, and against his father in his grave. So the pitfalls that lie in wait for the fool and the rogue were evaded—and every day they were evaded brought Frank nearer to his goal.

Sometimes he had the fear that David might die before he was able to break him—but David seemed as unchanging and perdurable as his hate. And then, in the beginning of the fourth year of his purpose, Frank fell in love with Shirley Free.

He was lucky—Shirleys are infrequent. She was everything he had wanted rather dumbly and never had. They were very happy. But he did not tell her the whole of his purpose, for he knew her to be forgiving. Perhaps it was as well; for, abruptly, the invisible persecution tightened its net, and David appeared anew.

A glimpse of David, passing them in an automobile as Shirley and he were walking a country road; on another occasion looking out of the window and seeing a gaunt observant figure on the other side of the street—an ominous coincidence, too often repeated to be accidental.

The wedding was to be in October. The plans of the independents were coming to a head—and only the certainty of Shirley and Shirley's devotion kept Frank up through the straining summer months. As it was, he grew nervous and edgy—and David walked through his dreams.

When Frank discovered, a month before the date of the wedding, that David had actually seen and talked with Shirley—it was the last straw.

"But, Frank," said Shirley, puzzled, "after all—I'll admit I was a little scared at first, he *is* rather scary. But he didn't say anything that——"

"H'm," said Frank, "did he try to—bully——"

"Why—no, dear. I don't see quite why he came—except——"

"Yes?"

"Well—I had a vague sort of feeling that he was—well—looking me over—like a judge—only I don't know what he thought. He said he was coming again——"

"Well, he won't," said Frank, briefly. "This has to stop.

I can stand his spying on me, but he sha'n't touch *you*. I'll stop it, I tell you—I'll stop it——" His voice rose harshly. "Oh, I know him, Shirley—God knows what he's up to now; but he's a devil, I tell you—a devil——"

Shirley managed to quiet him for a time. But when he left her, he went straight to David's house. He walked there—it was a long way—but he felt no fatigue. The consuming rage that burned in him was too intense. It made his body feel light as pith and very strong—he was quite calm, but he felt as if, this time, he could take David and break him in his hands like a crust.

He noticed with strange detachment, as he sat there, waiting for David, that the gloomy living room had not changed since the last time he had seen it, years before. There was David's cigar box on the table, and the picture of Frances above the fireplace. The room was terribly full of David's presence. For an instant Frank was a haunted small boy again, looking round the room with scared eyes, listening for the majestic footfalls of a great, gaunt figure that stalked over gloomy carpets with the terrifying pride of a damned archangel. Then his courage and rage returned—for David came in.

David had not altered in the years. The deep eyes still burned; the grim, imperious face kept its lean and haughty repose. His walk was not quite so certain—that was all.

He carried a bundle of papers in his hand. "Well, Frank," he said, without surprise, "sit down."

He sat down himself and began to look through the papers, now and then making a little correction with a fountain pen. The sudden assurance of triumph flared up in Frank's mind. The papers were a shield—and an ineffective shield. David was afraid of him, at last.

Frank began to speak, and his voice had the intense composure of a man who has finally mastered his bitterest enemy. David heard him out, toward the end his pen moving slowly over a fresh sheet of paper as he listened. His attitude seemed to acknowledge defeat.

"I told you I'd break you," Frank ended, "and I'm going to. You'll be broken within six months, no matter what happens. This is the end."

"Broken—by you?" said David rather quietly.

Frank smiled. "Not entirely—but you couldn't have been broken without me—yet. You need some sort of a string to tie the loose sticks together into a club. I've been the string. It's taken four years, but I've tied the sticks together—in spite of your spying and watching—in spite of all you could do——"

"So you noticed my—spying," said David, and smiled.

"But now," said Frank, unheeding, "the spying must stop. Stop—do you understand? You can spy on me all you like—but you'll leave Shirley alone! I don't know what your idea was in spying on her—but this is the end of it! Do you hear?"

"Yes," said David, going on with his writing. "This is the end of it. I sha'n't bother her any more."

"Very well," said Frank. "Then——" And suddenly, in spite of the conclusiveness of his victory, he was irritated by the other's calm. "What are you writing?" he ended, illogically.

"A letter." David smiled. He came to the end of a paragraph, hesitated, and carefully signed his name. "Here," he said, and passed the papers over to Frank.

"What on——" said Frank, amazed.

"Read it," said David, and sank back in his chair.

Frank took the pages gingerly. He glanced at the heading of the letter. It began "My dear son." He looked at David, astounded, but David gave no sign. Frank settled himself to read.

"My dear Son:

"I had at one time hoped to make this explanation of certain matters to you in a different manner—but I am a sick old man, now, and talk tires me. Besides, there are other reasons. So you will receive this letter in the approved manner—either after my death, or when I am so near it that there need be no hesitancy on your part in believing what I say. The doctor gives me a little while now—if I live piddlingly—which I do not intend to do.

"You may, perhaps, have wondered at many things in my attitude toward you, before you discovered what seemed to you the logical explanation of that attitude. The real

explanation goes back into the past, to the days when I first knew your mother and your father.

"There is no need of telling you what your mother was. She was an incomparable creature—a saint without pretence—the kindest and gentlest of women. Your mother gave me what happiness I have had, except the brief happiness that comes from crushing an obstacle; and if I have been able to live through these last years, it has been by remembering her. I do not demand that you believe this—but it is true.

"Your father was one of the most charming men that I have ever known—and one of the worst. He was one of those rare people whom life rots with too much sun—with too great good-fortune—and who spoil the lives closest to them with the careless cruelty of a pampered child. With every facility, with every opportunity, he was profligate, cowardly, eaten with mean little sins. I do not ask you to accept this statement on hearsay; I offer letters of his own—of your mother's—of his friends—other testimony.

"He was breaking your mother's heart when he died—and she did not know the worst—he had great skill in concealment. And now the worst is long dead and will not rise—I have seen to that. Here is the evidence, my son."

Frank, white to the lips, examined the attached sheaf of papers. He did not have to read them to the end—the damnation of a soul was written too plainly across the mildest of them. They could not have been forged; every line had the accent of truth; he knew three of the handwritings at least; he knew his mother's way of putting a thing. He sucked in a sobbing breath through tight lips, and went on reading:

"You will destroy these papers, of course.

"You must remember that I had known your mother from a child—slightly enough, but enough to know what she was. I know the men who work for me—I knew your father, too. And knowing that—I knew what the end would be, unless Chance intervened. Your mother was fatally loyal.

"Well, I took upon myself the prerogative of Chance—the prerogative of God. I was a younger man then, and I knew

my strength. I made a resolve—if Chance did not intervene within a certain space of time, I would.

"Yes, I was in love with your mother. But I gave him his chance—I stuck to my bargain. I had him in and talked to him, with some frankness. I had the right, considering his position in the company. He was as sneering as he dared—what business was it of mine? What he did in private—his private life was his own affair. He as much as boasted of your mother's forgiveness of him—he seemed to think it a little absurd. That was hard for me to bear—but I gave him his chance.

"If he had been anything but appetites and grace, the place where I sent him might have made a man of him. But he was not—I had thought he would not be. He died there as I had thought he would die. I killed him—if you like. Deliberately! Those who assume God's prerogative of mortal justice have their own punishment. Your mother married me—and we were happy, for a time. Yes, she was happy. Then the people began to whisper—and she died. I had not calculated upon the strength of whispers. She died. That was my punishment. But in spite of everything, I cannot regret what I did—for if it were to do over again, I would do the same.

"At least your mother trusted me till the end. If she had not, she would not have left you in my charge.

"You may never have seen your father's picture as a child. Your physical likeness to him was startling—and it went to more than externals. You have some of his tricks of manner, even now. And, when you were a boy, you were almost entirely his.

"You could have been spoiled and petted as he was spoiled. You could have been trained in his precise likeness, body and mind—a child is impressionable, and you were very like him from the start. Sometimes it frightened me to see how like him you were. But I had a charge from your mother. I could not see you grow and become like him while I had my strength.

"You may often have thought your training a rigorous one. It was. I made it so. You may have thought me unfriendly, scornful, hateful. I was. I chose to be your enemy rather than your friend, because it is by wrestling with an

enemy almost too much for one that one gets courage and endurance and fortitude. I chose to make life hard and difficult for you, where it might have been smooth and easy, so that you would not drown in stale honey, as your father drowned. I do not repent.

"I do not repent, for with test after test, you got hardier, and surer, and less afraid of anything, even of me. I made you my worthy enemy. I bound the difficult habit of years upon you like an honourable chain—and hardened, hardened it, till at last your father lay dead in you, and you had an armour not even success could pierce.

"Then, when you were a man, I let you find out, as you thought. You took it as I hoped you would take it—and the night you said you would break me, I looked at you and knew that between us we had made a man. But you were very young, and I was not quite certain.

"I made it my business to be entirely certain, though my time was growing short. But I could not face your mother and not be certain. So once again I took upon myself a certain prerogative, and where you went, I spied upon you like a ghost. In all ways I left you free to make your own decisions—and if you had fallen in the mire deliberately, I would not have raised you—or I might have raised you scornfully, and given you the petty damnation of easy riches, and died. But you did not fall. A strong man does not lie down before his enemy. You prospered instead, till now you are ready to break me, and I can go.

"I can go, for your marriage was my last concern, and I have seen you with the girl you are to marry, and seen her alone and heard her talk of you. You do not lie to women, as your father did, and you have chosen as I hoped you would choose. Your mother would like her, my son.

"Well, it has been a long task, and it is finished. I could have been kinder to you easily, though you may doubt that. I have had no son of my body. You have been my son. Sometimes, indeed more frequently than you might suppose, it was somewhat difficult not to be too kind.

"Do not think, by the way, that your present success is in any way due to me. I fought your business combinations with all my skill. But you have been too strong and adroit for me there. That is all.

"As for my material fortune, such as it is, it will go not to you but to charity, except for a certain portion, justly yours. You do not need the rest now. You would only have needed it if you had failed. There are certain things of your mother's you will probably wish to keep. I have made arrangements for that. Of course" (*a line of erasure*) "you are welcome to any of my personal effects, should you desire them.

"I wish you good fortune, my son, with a free mind, now. Perhaps it is nothing to you that when I die, I shall be able to rest, now, but it is something to me. Perhaps you have a——(*the line was unfinished*).

"Very sincerely,
"Your father,
"DAVID DAVENANT."

Frank stared up from the last page. Strange, difficult tears stung at his eyes.

"Father," he said, gently.

There was no answer.

He sprang up. "Father—Father," he called over and over; but the figure in the other chair did not stir.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

By RICHARD CONNELL

From *Collier's*

OFF there to the right—somewhere—is a large island," said Whitney. "It's rather a mystery——"

"What island is it?" Rainsford asked.

"The old charts call it 'Ship-Trap Island,'" Whitney replied. "A suggestive name, isn't it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don't know why. Some superstition——"

"Can't see it," remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness in upon the yacht.

"You've good eyes," said Whitney, with a laugh, "and I've seen you pick off a moose moving in the brown fall bush at four hundred yards, but even you can't see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night."

"Nor four yards," admitted Rainsford. "Ugh! It's like moist black velvet."

"It will be light enough in Rio," promised Whitney. "We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey's. We should have some good hunting up the Amazon. Great sport, hunting."

"The best sport in the world," agreed Rainsford.

"For the hunter," amended Whitney. "Not for the jaguar."

"Don't talk rot, Whitney," said Rainsford. "You're a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?"

"Perhaps the jaguar does," observed Whitney.

"Bah! They've no understanding."

"Even so, I rather think they understand one thing—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death."

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we've passed that island yet?"

"I can't tell in the dark. I hope so."

"Why?" asked Rainsford.

"The place has a reputation—a bad one."

"Cannibals?" suggested Rainsford.

"Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn't live in such a God-forsaken place. But it's gotten into sailor lore, somehow. Didn't you notice that the crew's nerves seemed a bit jumpy to-day?"

"They were a bit strange, now you mention it. Even Captain Nielsen——"

"Yes, even that tough-minded old Swede, who'd go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. Those fishy blue eyes held a look I never saw there before. All I could get out of him was: 'This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.' Then he said to me, very gravely: 'Don't you feel anything?'—as if the air about us was actually poisonous. Now, you mustn't laugh when I tell you this—I did feel something like a sudden chill.

"There was no breeze. The sea was as flat as a plate-glass window. We were drawing near the island then. What I felt was a—a mental chill; a sort of sudden dread."

"Pure imagination," said Rainsford. "One superstitious sailor can taint the whole ship's company with his fear."

"Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think evil is a tangible thing—with wave lengths, just as sound and light have. An evil place can, so to speak, broadcast vibrations of evil. Anyhow, I'm glad we're getting out of this zone. Well, I think I'll turn in now, Rainsford."

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe up on the after deck."

"Good-night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast."

"Right. Good-night, Whitney."

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford sat there but the muffled throb of the engine that drove the yacht

swiftly through the darkness, and the swish and ripple of the wash of the propeller.

Rainsford, reclining in a steamer chair, indolently puffed on his favourite brier. The sensuous drowsiness of the night was on him. "It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids——"

An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times.

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the reports had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; a short, hoarse cry came from his lips as he realized he had reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. A certain cool-headedness had come to him; it was not the first time he had been in a tight place. There was a chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht, but that chance was slender, and grew more slender as the yacht raced on. He wrestled himself out of his clothes, and shouted with all his power. The lights of the yacht became faint and ever-vanishing fireflies; then they were blotted out entirely by the night.

Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and doggedly he swam in that direction, swimming with slow, deliberate strokes, conserving his strength. For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more and then——

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high, screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror.

He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another noise, crisp, staccato.

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes of determined effort brought another sound to his ears—the most welcome he had ever heard—the muttering and growling of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He was almost on the rocks before he saw them; on a night less calm he would have been shattered against them. With his remaining strength he dragged himself from the swirling waters. Jagged crags appeared to jut up into the opaqueness; he forced himself upward, hand over hand. Gasping, his hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. Dense jungle came down to the very edge of the cliffs. What perils that tangle of trees and underbrush might hold for him did not concern Rainsford just then. All he knew was that he was safe from his enemy, the sea, and that utter weariness was on him. He flung himself down at the jungle edge and tumbled headlong into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigour; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked about him, almost cheerfully.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled and ragged jungle fringed the shore.

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he had landed, he stopped.

Some wounded thing, by the evidence a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down and the moss was lacerated; one patch of weeds was stained crimson. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford's eye and he picked it up. It was an empty cartridge.

"A twenty-two," he remarked. "That's odd. It must have been a fairly large animal, too. The hunter had his nerve with him to tackle it with a light gun. It's clear that

the brute put up a fight. I suppose the first three shots I heard was when the hunter flushed his quarry and wounded it. The last shot was when he trailed it here and finished it."

He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find—the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along, now slipping on a rotten log or a loose stone, but making headway; night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them as he turned a crook in the coast line, and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he forged along he saw to his great astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous building—a lofty structure with pointed towers plunging upward into the gloom. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial château; it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

"Mirage," thought Rainsford. But it was no mirage, he found, when he opened the tall spiked iron gate. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet about it all hung an air of unreality.

He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard steps within; the door remained closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker, and let it fall. The door opened then, opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring, and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of glaring gold light that poured out. The first thing Rainsford's eyes discerned was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen—a gigantic creature, solidly made and black-bearded to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barrelled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart.

Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

"Don't be alarmed," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming. "I'm no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City."

The menacing look in the eyes did not change. The revolver pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He

gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in uniform, a black uniform trimmed with gray astrakhan.

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a yacht. I am hungry."

The man's only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man's free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in evening clothes. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand.

In a cultivated voice marked by a slight accent that gave it added precision and deliberateness, he said: "It is a very great pleasure and honour to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home."

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military moustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheek bones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat. Turning to the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his pistol, saluted, withdrew.

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack," said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I.

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be chatting here. We can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot."

Ivan had reappeared, and the general spoke to him with lips that moved but gave forth no sound.

"Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford," said the general. "I was about to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge, beam-ceilinged bedroom with a canopied bed big enough for six men that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor who ordinarily cut and sewed for none below the rank of duke.

The dining room to which Ivan conducted him was in many ways remarkable. There was a mediæval magnificence about it; it suggested a baronial hall of feudal times with its oaken panels, its high ceiling, its vast refectory table where two score men could sit down to eat. About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

"You'll have a cocktail, Mr. Rainsford," he suggested. The cocktail was surpassingly good; and, Rainsford noted, the table appointments were of the finest—the linen, the crystal, the silver, the china.

They were eating *borsch*, the rich red soup with whipped cream so dear to Russian palates. Half apologetically General Zaroff said: "We do our best to preserve the amenities of civilization here. Please forgive any lapses. We are well off the beaten track, you know. Do you think the champagne has suffered from its long ocean trip?"

"Not in the least," declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a most thoughtful and affable host, a true cosmopolite. But there was one small trait of the general's that made Rainsford uncomfortable. Whenever he looked up from his plate he found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly.

"Perhaps," said General Zaroff, "you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting published in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt."

"You have some wonderful heads here," said Rainsford as he ate a particularly well-cooked filet mignon. "That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw."

"Oh, that fellow. Yes, he was a monster."

"Did he charge you?"

"Hurled me against a tree," said the general. "Fractured my skull. But I got the brute."

"I've always thought," said Rainsford, "that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game."

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling his curious red-lipped smile. Then he said slowly: "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game." He sipped his wine. "Here in my preserve on this island," he said, in the same slow tone, "I hunt more dangerous game."

Rainsford expressed his surprise. "Is there big game on this island?"

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island."

"What have you imported, General?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. I exhausted their possibilities, you see. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford."

The general took from his pocket a gold cigarette case and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver tip; it was perfumed and gave off a smell like incense.

"We will have some capital hunting, you and I," said the general. "I shall be most glad to have your society."

"But what game——" began Rainsford.

"I'll tell you," said the general. "You will be amused, I know. I think I may say, in all modesty, that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation. May I pour you another glass of port, Mr. Rainsford?"

"Thank you, General."

The general filled both glasses, and said: "God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man with a quarter of a million acres in the Crimea, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow for me, to shoot sparrows

with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army—it was expected of noblemen's sons—and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed."

The general puffed at his cigarette.

"After the débâcle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Tsar to stay there. Many noble Russians lost everything. I, luckily, had invested heavily in American securities, so I shall never have to open a tea room in Monte Carlo or drive a taxi in Paris. Naturally, I continued to hunt—grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodiles in the Ganges, rhinoceroses in East Africa. It was in Africa that the Cape buffalo hit me and laid me up for six months. As soon as I recovered I started for the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard they were unusually cunning. They weren't." The Cossack sighed. "They were no match at all for a hunter with his wits about him, and a high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting, remember, had been my life. I have heard that in America business men often go to pieces when they give up the business that has been their life."

"Yes, that's so," said Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I had no wish to go to pieces," he said. "I must do something. Now, mine is an analytical mind, Mr. Rainsford. Doubtless that is why I enjoy the problems of the chase."

"No doubt, General Zaroff."

"So," continued the general, "I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. You are much younger than I am, Mr. Rainsford, and have not hunted as much, but you perhaps can guess the answer."

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call 'a

sporting proposition.' It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette.

"No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this it was a tragic moment for me, I can tell you."

Rainsford leaned across the table, absorbed in what his host was saying.

"It came to me as an inspiration what I must do," the general went on.

"And that was?"

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said.

"A new animal? You're joking."

"Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps——"

"But the animal, General Zaroff?"

"Oh," said the general, "it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits."

Rainsford's bewilderment showed in his face.

"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said: 'What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?' And the answer was, of course: 'It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.'"

"But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "there is one that can."

"But you can't mean——" gasped Rainsford.

"And why not?"

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke."

"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."

"Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder."

The general laughed with entire good nature. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. "I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbours romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war——"

"Did not make me condone cold-blooded murder," finished Rainsford, stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. "How extraordinarily droll you are!" he said. "One does not expect nowadays to find a young man of the educated class, even in America, with such a naïve, and, if I may say so, mid-Victorian point of view. It's like finding a snuffbox in a limousine. Ah, well, doubtless you had Puritan ancestors. So many Americans appear to have had. I'll wager you'll forget your notions when you go hunting with me. You've a genuine new thrill in store for you, Mr. Rainsford."

"Thank you, I'm a hunter, not a murderer."

"Dear me," said the general, quite unruffled, "again that unpleasant word. But I think I can show you that your scruples are quite ill founded."

"Yes?"

"Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my gift? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt the scum of the earth—sailors from tramp ships—lascars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels—a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them."

"But they are men," said Rainsford, hotly.

"Precisely," said the general. "That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion. So they are dangerous."

"But where do you get them?"

The general's left eyelid fluttered down in a wink. "This island is called Ship Trap," he answered. "Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes,

when Providence is not so kind, I help Providence a bit. Come to the window with me."

Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. Rainsford's eyes saw only blackness, and then, as the general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none: giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said, casually, as if in answer to a question. "I have electricity. We try to be civilized here."

"Civilized? And you shoot down men?"

A trace of anger was in the general's black eyes, but it was there for but a second, and he said, in his most pleasant manner: "Dear me, what a righteous young man you are! I assure you I do not do the thing you suggest. That would be barbarous. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. They're from the Spanish bark *Sanlúcar* that had the bad luck to go on the rocks out there. A very inferior lot, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to the deck than to the jungle."

He raised his hand, and Ivan, who served as waiter, brought thick Turkish coffee. Rainsford, with an effort, held his tongue in check.

"It's a game, you see," pursued the general, blandly. "I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. I am to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest calibre and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him"—the general smiled—"he loses."

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

"Oh," said the general, "I give him his option, of course. He need not play that game if he doesn't wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honour of serving as official knouter to the Great White Tsar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt."

"And if they win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost," he said.

Then he added, hastily: "I don't wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. Occasionally I strike a tartar. One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs."

"The dogs?"

"This way, please. I'll show you."

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering illumination that made grotesque patterns on the courtyard below, and Rainsford could see moving about there a dozen or so huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their eyes glittered greenly.

"A rather good lot, I think," observed the general. "They are let out at seven every night. If any one should try to get into my house—or out of it—something extremely regrettable would occur to him." He hummed a snatch of song from the Folies Bergère.

"And now," said the general, "I want to show you my new collection of heads. Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford, "that you will excuse me to-night, General Zaroff. I'm really not feeling at all well."

"Ah, indeed?" the general inquired, solicitously. "Well, I suppose that's only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night's sleep. To-morrow you'll feel like a new man, I'll wager. Then we'll hunt, eh? I've one rather promising prospect——"

Rainsford was hurrying from the room.

"Sorry you can't go with me to-night," called the general. "I expect rather fair sport—a big, strong black. He looks resourceful—— Well, good-night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fibre of his being, but nevertheless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the château were out now, and it was dark and silent, but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its wan light he could see, dimly, the courtyard; there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up, expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol.

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint."

To Rainsford's questioning glance the general said: "Ennui. Boredom."

Then, taking a second helping of Crêpes Suzette, the general explained: "The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. They do excessively stupid and obvious things. It's most annoying. Will you have another glass of Chablis, Mr. Rainsford?"

"General," said Rainsford, firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting——"

"I wish to go to-day," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff's face suddenly brightened.

He filled Rainsford's glass with venerable Chablis from a dusty bottle.

"To-night," said the general, "we will hunt—you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, General," he said. "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan's?"

He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

"You don't mean——" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel—at last."

The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said, enthusiastically. "Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess! And the stake is not without value, eh?"

"And if I win——" began Rainsford, huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff. "My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town."

The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

"Oh, you can trust me," said the Cossack. "I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course, you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case—— But why discuss that now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of Veuve Cliquot, unless——"

The general sipped his wine.

Then a businesslike air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We call it Death Swamp.

There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable part of it was that Lazarus followed him. You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Rainsford. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You'll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? Au revoir, Mr. Rainsford, au revoir."

General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a haversack of food, a leather sheath containing a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a cocked revolver thrust in the crimson sash about his waist. . . .

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said, through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear-headed when the château gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, and, to this end, he had plunged along, spurred on by the sharp rowels of something very like panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped, and was taking stock of himself and the situation.

He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a frame of water, and his operations, clearly, must take place within that frame.

"I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford, and he struck off from the rude path he had been following into the trackless wilderness. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again, recalling all the lore of the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him leg-weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a thickly wooded ridge. He knew it would be insane to blunder on through the dark, even if he had the strength. His need for rest was imperative and he thought: "I have played the fox, now I must play the cat of the fable." A big tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches was

near by, and, taking care to leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and stretching out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so zealous a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that complicated trail through the jungle after dark. But perhaps the general was a devil——

An apprehensive night crawled slowly by like a wounded snake, and sleep did not visit Rainsford, although the silence of a dead world was on the jungle. Toward morning, when a dingy gray was varnishing the sky, the cry of some startled bird focussed Rainsford's attention in that direction. Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb, and through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. The thing that was approaching was a man.

It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees, and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic—a small automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent incense-like smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were travelling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come. The swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could

follow an extremely difficult trail; he must have uncanny powers; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through his whole being. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true, but the truth was as evident as the sun that had by now pushed through the morning mists. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree, and struck off again into the woods. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding bough that was the trigger. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear again gripping his heart, heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

"Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. Luckily for me I, too, have hunted in Malacca. You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it's only a slight one. But I shall be back. I shall be back."

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate, hopeless flight, that carried him on for some hours. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins; the vegetation grew ranker, denser; insects bit him savagely. Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort he tore his foot loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand.

His hands were tight closed as if his nerve were something tangible that someone in the darkness was trying to tear from his grip. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so and, like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig.

Rainsford had dug himself in in France when a second's delay meant death. That had been a placid pastime compared to his digging now. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew his pursuer was coming; he heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness; he was not feeling his way along, foot by foot. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see the general, nor could he see

the pit. He lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. He leaped up from his place of concealment. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with an electric torch in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has claimed one of my best dogs. Again you score. I think, Mr. Rainsford, I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was a distant sound, faint and wavering, but he knew it. It was the baying of a pack of hounds.

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. That was postponing the inevitable. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and, tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

The baying of the hounds drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. On a ridge Rainsford climbed a tree. Down a watercourse, not a quarter of a mile away, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes, he saw the lean figure of General Zaroff; just ahead of him, Rainsford made out another figure whose wide shoulders surged through the tall jungle weeds; it was the giant Ivan, and he seemed pulled forward by some unseen force; Rainsford knew that Ivan must be holding the pack in leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped, too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. But Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not wholly failed.

Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Ever nearer drew the hounds. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. He reached it. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the château. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask, lit a perfumed cigarette, and hummed a bit from "Madama Butterfly."

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great panelled dining hall that evening. With it he had a bottle of Pol Roger and half a bottle of Chambertin. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course the American hadn't played the game—so thought the general as he tasted his after-dinner liqueur. In his library he read, to soothe himself, from the works of Marcus Aurelius. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so before turning on his light he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called: "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . . "

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

HORSE AND HORSE

By CHARLES CALDWELL DOBIE

From *Harper's*

HANK WHEELOCK'S first conclusion was that he had come upon a vagrant snow patch. But the idea had barely emerged before he realized its absurdity. Could it be that the scorching humour of the desert had at last seared him to a point of daftness? . . . He moved slowly toward the outer rim of whiteness, as if fearful lest the vision might dissolve, but the mirage did not recede; it became if anything more tangible, more crystalline, more emphatic. Surely this pool of frozen purity had not been there last week.

He bent over, tracing figures in the glistening surface with his gun: if he were mad his new estate had been accomplished with completeness! He next trusted his fingers to a confirmation of the fact before him. He had almost expected a cool reaction, but the scorch of accumulated sunshine bit ruthlessly into his flesh. Immediately every spark of animation was extinguished within him: the suggestion flashing through his mind was too tremendous, too fantastic to be met save in complete immobility. For a full minute he lay upon his belly, there in the yellow sand, like a huge gray lizard fascinated by the prospect of an iridescent meal. When he moved again, it was to scoop up a handful of burning whiteness. Even now he did not altogether credit his senses. He moistened a forefinger, carrying its powdered surface back to his tongue. He knew the look of it, the taste of it, and yet he was not to be trapped unduly. He whipped out his pocket magnifier. His conclusions were reluctant, constrained by the incautions of a lifetime. Borax? . . . Could it be possible—here by the roadway's rim within a day's journey of the railroad? . . . He felt himself grow suddenly weak and he had the wit to realize that the

sun was in no humour to brook defiance. He moved slowly into the truce of a rocky ledge, sprawling full length in its shadow. Overhead, three buzzards formed a sinister merry-go-round against the turquoise sky. Their foul expectations made Hank Wheelock chuckle. In spite of his sixty years he was a long way from cashing in. Them fool buzzards! Didn't they know a tough old coyote when they saw one? Besides, he wasn't quite ready to provide grub for such an ornery lot of feathered bandits—not yet. He'd have another look at that outcropping of borax first. *Borax!* . . . He closed his eyes. Just wait until he told Jim Bledsoe about it! Foolish, futile Jim Bledsoe. Perhaps he wouldn't tell him! Perhaps he wouldn't tell nobody. It would depend.

He opened his eyes again. The buzzards had dropped a shade lower. A hot breeze began to catch up little whirls of sand and the loose pungent odours of the sagebrush. An intolerable longing for some far-off and dusky coolness oppressed Hank Wheelock. He thought of hedgerows and columbine and hollyhocks and the faint tinkle of silver fountains. After all, he *was* tired and old and ready to quit! And the buzzards overhead knew it. . . . But they didn't know that his luck had turned, that he had fortune by the throat. They didn't know that his was the surrender that always came within sight of the goal. . . . If they had they wouldn't have wasted time circling about him in such a calm, anticipatory frenzy.

He pulled himself to his feet, dragging back to that pool of whiteness which even now held such an element of unreality. Yes, it was still there—bared unaccountably for his achievement: A glimpse, a mere indication of what must lie buried for miles in every direction under the deceitful gray of the desert. And, in a sudden spasm of joy, he felt himself tossing his hat into the air and heard the exultant cry issuing from his throat, swallowed up flatly by the unhemmed spaces.

Overhead, the buzzards had ceased their circling. For a brief instant they held themselves motionless, then swept eastward with calm deliberation.

In the cool of evening Hank Wheelock went through the primitive gesture of marking the confines of his prospect with

bits of shale chipped from the ledge that had sheltered him from the sun. The definite rules for staking a claim he was unprepared to meet and yet some atavistic urge, harking back to the days when men made covenants with the gods, gave him a foolish pleasure in setting up symbols of his revelation. What he would have liked to do was to sweep back the sand over his treasure with a miraculous rake. There would be people passing and repassing, Indians for the most part, intent on the piñon harvest, perhaps gathering mesquite beans, or working toward the streams with their fish snares. These scarcely mattered, but others would pass, too—white men, with little sharp, beady eyes, seeking furtively to wrest secrets from the sun-bitten land. But the desert was capricious; it rewarded whom it would. Take his own case for instance: How many times had he scoured the blunt, squeezed hills to no purpose, coveting their treasures? . . . . And this same spot, with its ledge of rock that marked a waterhole of almost miraculous sweetness, how many times had he loitered in its gaunt shade, innocent of its hoard? . . . Last week, when he had tramped eastward to another futile tryst with fortune, his path had been without revelation. The country had lain somnolent under a blazing sun, taciturn and baffling, as always. But overnight a miracle had happened: a wanton wind had danced with gathering violence across the starlit mesa, furrowing the gleaming sand with its twinkling feet, tearing open quiescent wounds in its frenzy, revealing close-locked secrets. . . . To-night it was conceivable that another wind might rise, blotting out all trace of the one that had gone before, piling the restless sand discreetly back again. Hank Wheelock hoped that this might be so; such a prospect made him feel safer. He wanted to hoard his good fortune for a season, to guard it jealously. Would it be necessary to tell Jim Bledsoe? Not right off, anyhow. . . . He'd bide his time. . . . He might even persuade himself beyond that. . . . He'd do what was right, but he wasn't going to be no fool philanthropist. If they had come upon this secret together, that would have been one thing. . . . But they hadn't. . . . Yet Jim Bledsoe was still his partner.

Well, there was time enough to settle that. He wouldn't reach camp until the next morning. Twelve hours of solitude

in which to wrestle with the problem. That was enough for any man. . . . He decided to wait until nightfall before pushing on. When the moon rose he'd start. He flung himself back into the shelter of the rocky ledge. He wondered whether the buzzards would come winging back again. . . . But they didn't, and he fell asleep, chuckling.

He rose with a windless moon, heading south by west, munching thin strips of jerked venison as he walked. He was a spare eater on the trail and he drank from his canteen scantily, barely moistening his lips. The land lay in a cool truce of incredible silver, invoking dreams and fancies and extravagances. He felt a mysterious affinity with hidden forces; like some primitive hero who had been singled out for favour by the gods. His discovery of the afternoon linked him with the elements, made him touch hands with illimitable time and space. He thought vaguely of the extraordinary patience of nature and its still more extraordinary whimsies. Imagine piling up a glistening treasure for millions of years, then hiding it slyly, in the end to yield the secret to a chance passer-by. He had seen uncovered borax marshes in his day, stretching mile upon mile under a blazing sun, but never before had there come to his knowledge one discreetly buried, like a dead city of the ancients. He tried to imagine it lying stark and white, as it must one day have done, picturing the first thin line of whirling sand that had drifted upon its pallid face. A few grains of sand . . . mere specks of golden grayness. Grains piling up to a handful. An island in the centre of a crystalline sea . . . the sea itself completely hidden! Then shrubs and reptiles and birds in their season. The primitive deceit accomplished. He ended by being staggered at so much elemental perseverance. It was like sprawling at full length with one's eyes upturned to the stars; it crushed you, somehow, until in very self-defence you turned away.

He saved his egotism by veering to problems within grasp. There was the matter of claim-staking, of launching a promotion scheme, of transportation. Twenty years before his imagination would have evoked endless mule teams chiming through the blistering heat to a railroad siding; now he supposed motor trucks would accomplish the task swiftly and

adequately. *Hank Wheelock, the new Borax King!* He ruffled with childish pride at the mere thought. . . . But at that he might sell out at once and let somebody else bask in the warmth of the title. This last speculation brought him sharply against the question of Jim Bledsoe again: Would he be justified in dissolving his partnership at this point? Not that he grudged Jim Bledsoe a share in his good fortune —oh, no, it wasn't that! But a man with a big project ought to have a clear field to develop it, without let or hindrance. Of course, he supposed Jim Bledsoe would give him a free rein, but then a man could never tell!

It wasn't as if the idea had never before occurred: for upward of forty years he had made periodic gestures toward cutting loose from Jim Bledsoe, to find him always in the end taking the path of least resistance. After all, it wasn't easy to ditch a partner who had the genial vice of optimism, who could rise from the most crushing defeat upon the wings of an irrational hope, whose rainbow fell always just a day's journey beyond. But looking back, Hank Wheelock had to admit that this had been Jim's sole contribution to their common cause: the claims they had staked, the boom towns they had entered, the mining stocks they had purchased on the strength of Jim Bledsoe's enthusiasms! And all to no purpose. . . . It was easy to trace the history of every move they had made toward opulence. The end was always the same; they had picked their penniless way back to the hills to pan dribbles of gold from reluctant stream-sides, or follow a promising ledge to its shallow source, or meet a quick turn in fortune on the spin of a faro wheel. But even then it had been Wheelock's luck that stood by. When had Bledsoe ever washed so much as a solitary nugget from a creek bed, or fallen upon a single gilded outcropping in the blunt, scarred hills, or played a winning number to retrieve their wasted substance? Never once in all them forty years, Wheelock told himself with a note of emphatic satisfaction.

Of course, no matter what his decision he'd never let old Bledsoe want: he'd be generous. And with keen delight he pictured himself in the rôle of patron, distributing largess. . . . Giving anybody a direct share—well, that was different. People never thanked you for what you conceded were their rights, and the term "partnership" would smother any

impulse toward gratitude in Jim Bledsoe. To his dying day Jim would argue:

"Well, who knows—if Hank hadn't struck it rich mebbe I would have!"

And the worst of it all was that old Jim Bledsoe would believe it. Forty luckless years hadn't taught him anything. Wasn't he at this very moment out on another of his foolish quests? How foolish, Hank Wheelock could only speculate, since Jim had enveloped his movements in childish mystery. He'd said casually one night over their beans and coffee:

"I had a notion I'd run up toward Heron Falls for a spell. . . . You ain't got any use for that pack animal, have yer? Leastways, not before next week?"

Hank Wheelock had tried to veil his scorn under a show of indifference. "Pack animal? . . . I should say not! . . . I ain't figuring on taking more'n a ton of ore outer that pocket back of Antelope."

His sarcasm had winged past Jim. "Well," Bledsoe had replied, "yer never can tell. . . . I allus figured there might be a likely lead in there. . . . Still, I kinder lean to a country that ain't so all-fired ornery. Prospects, I say, is a good deal like women folks; it may be a mite harder to find 'em both rich and pretty, but it can be done!"

Wheelock had met this statement with the silent contempt it deserved: Neither Bledsoe's prospects nor his women had ever qualified in either particular.

Well, there hadn't been a likely lead back of Antelope . . . there hadn't been a dribble of ore large enough to so much as fill the obsolete watch pocket in Hank Wheelock's sun-bleached coat. The country had been like Jim Bledsoe's women, at once destitute and forbidding. On the surface, of course. It hadn't opened its hand to a man poking about for trifles. . . . Hank Wheelock might have known that, he might have guessed that its frugality had an element of concealment in it, like some crusty old philanthropist making gestures toward poverty to test the object of its favour. . . . He speculated with a derisive grunt what sort of geological philandering Jim Bledsoe was up to around Heron Falls. A soft country, truly—buried in a carpet of pine needles; full of the muffled whirr of quail coveys; spilling water in lacy cascades down its greenly wreathed sides. A place

for loafing, a spot to rob you of everything but content, a sure despoiler of ambition. . . . Jim had gone there fishing, that was it. And one day he'd blow back into camp with a mess of trout and an air of carrying the plunder of an empire in his straw-packed fishing basket. . . . Hank Wheelock knew! . . . A mess of fish—nothing more or less.

He, Hank Wheelock, would be bringing back a fortune and his partner, Jim Bledsoe, would throw down a dozen trout as his contribution to the jackpot. . . . Not this time! It didn't take Hank Wheelock one half of his allotted twelve hours to settle that question. The moon had scarcely risen to its full height when he had come to a final and irrevocable decision.

For the rest of the journey he was content with a thousand opulent anticipations, not the least of which was the ever-recurring picture of himself in the rôle of patron to old Jim Bledsoe. This speculation had a pungent sting to it, like a dash of spice in a draught of mulled wine. He didn't think of it as insolence because, one thing, he didn't know that insolence was at the back of every condescension, but chiefly because his sense of introspection had been seasoned beneath the sky-blue of heaven. He saw only the large masses on a canvas in which generosity loomed big. He ignored its shadow. Suddenly he had made the first step toward despotism—he was willing to grant a million privileges but not a single right. And in his new-found arrogance he felt that if he but reached upward he could have touched the stars!

Toward daybreak he saw afar the curling gray of a camp fire, and he knew that Jim Bledsoe was already back. This fact disturbed him: he hadn't reckoned on facing so swiftly the issue uppermost in his mind. But his first irritation was succeeded by a sense of poignant anticipation. It would be good to have the coffeepot already steaming over the brush fire and smell the bacon drippings in the frying pan. It would be pleasant, too, to stretch out in the gray-green coolness of the willow trees and ruminate over a pipe with the genial putterings of old Jim Bledsoe within sight and earshot. Some folks would have scorned the meagre delights of this particular camp site, but Hank Wheelock always had argued that it served admirably. Where else for upward of a hundred miles could one have found a railroad water tank

dripping moisture and within striking distance of wooded mountain or sunburnt mesa, depending on one's direction and inclination? There was greenery enough and outlook enough and solitude enough; and, plus all that, an extraordinary sense of contact with life in just the fact of that ribbon of steel rails bearing thirsty engines to their slaking. A drowsy place, to be precise, as a camp site should be. . . . But it wouldn't stay drowsy for ever, not with Hank Wheelock's borax marshes twelve hours distant by foot trail. *Hank Wheelock's* borax marshes, mark you—not the borax marshes of *Bledsoe* and Wheelock! . . . The railroad siding would have a name, too—Wheelock's Junction. How did that sound? And, in a faint mirage, instead of a captured watercourse coaxing willows to moist pasturage, he saw rise before him a dust-stung town at once clamorous and unlovely. Thus, midway, between chuckling satisfaction and a vague regret, he bore down upon Jim Bledsoe fanning a reluctant fire in the early morning light.

They greeted each other with clipped masculine monosyllables and lapsed speedily into the grateful silence of long association. As Wheelock had guessed, fish *had* been flashing in the sunlight of Heron Creek, for above the inevitable pungence of coffee and warming bacon grease there rose the sweetish odour of trout browning to a turn. . . . The meal ended, two pipes sent out the villainous perfumes of male contentment, and Jim Bledsoe, turning his faded blue eyes upon his partner, said:

"How'd things turn out back of Antelope?"

Hank Wheelock pulled up to the bitter task before him.

"They didn't. . . . I got to thinking things over on the way back: Jim Bledsoe, we ain't gettin' nowhere."

The blue eyes continued to stare at Hank Wheelock with bland tolerance. "Wal, if yer mean we can't just see the end of the trail, I'll allow that. . . . It's the bends in the roads yer can't look past that makes our game interesting. Leastways, that's my notion."

Hank Wheelock stirred the ashes in his pipe with a burnt match. "You always was a dreamer, Jim Bledsoe," he said, with a faint note of scorn. "Mebbe I was one, too, way back. . . . But I've passed too many of them bends

yer talk so much about. That's all they are—bends. One's just like another—more t'other side—that's all. And it gits narrower and narrower all the time, harder to do in double harness. . . . I come to the conclusion last night that after a while it's safer to make the grade single file."

He didn't look at Jim Bledsoe when he said this; he didn't have to—the long silence that followed told him that his shaft had struck home.

"Yer mean yer want to break the partnership?"

"I was thinking of it."

"Pshaw . . . not now, Hank—not after nigh on to forty years."

"That's just it—forty years! . . . Forty years turning them bends in the road yer talk so much about." Hank Wheelock's voice rose with a sort of desperate vehemence. "We've just been dead weight to each other, somehow. . . . You'll say, 'Wait for the next turn!' I know what's beyond *that*—the poorhouse!"

A look of bewilderment crept into Jim Bledsoe's glance. "You're wrong there, Hank. I ain't said nothin', I was just waitin' to surprise yer, but up Heron Falls way there's a prospect that——"

A low guttural laugh, two-edged with contempt, sent Jim Bledsoe's revelation scattering.

"Prospects—up by Heron Falls! . . . I guess a mess of fish now and then's about all yer'll ever take out of *that* country! . . . I heerd tell of your prospects before!"

Jim Bledsoe fumbled for his tobacco pouch, and his hand shook. "Yer right, Hank Wheelock," he said, in a voice that was much too high and clear and confident. "It's *time* you and me was quittin'."

Jim Bledsoe spoke to him once more—after the evening meal. He came and stood close to where Hank lay sprawled before the camp fire. He was ready for the trail—blanket roll, canteen, and canvas bag snug with essentials.

"I'm going over to Heron Falls," he said, without rancour, "and after that I'll drop down into Potterville. . . . Ain't nuthin' I can do for yer down that way, is there?"

Hank Wheelock stirred himself to a sitting posture. "How soon yer coming back?"

"I ain't coming back—leastways not the way I'm figgerin' now. . . . I'll stick to the timber fur a while. . . . I've had enough of this here alkali country."

Hank came to his feet. "How about dividing things up?"

Jim Bledsoe swept the issue aside with a gesture of indifference. "Ain't much to divvy, is there? A few camp contraptions and a pack animal. I figgered you'd need 'em more than me. I won't be runnin' wild much longer."

His voice was untinged with patronage, yet his words brought the blood to Hank Wheelock's forehead. "I'd rather we cleaned up right!" he threw back, savagely.

Jim Bledsoe shrugged. "I've got all the best of it *now!*" he answered.

Hank Wheelock twisted his lips into a smile. "Well, if you're satisfied . . ." he said.

Their hands came together instinctively.

"Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

The sound of old Jim Bledsoe shuffling into the darkness . . . wind drawing up the mesa . . . the piercing wail of a coyote. . . . *After forty years!* . . .

He lay all night beside the camp fire, gazing up at the stars. An extraordinary sense of freedom possessed him. He had no one to answer to now except God, and His outline had grown too vague to throw any shadow. Curious how irksome a human relationship could become! Not that old Jim Bledsoe ever meddled, but he was always there, an unescapable fact to be reckoned with. After all, what had happened was inevitable. The surprising thing was that it had been delayed so long. Jim Bledsoe would be happier—he'd be free to loaf in the timber now, undisturbed by the clatter of achievement. Bledsoe was never a man to face facts, anyway. He was always veiling his passion for the soft seductions of the stream and forest in a pretence of prospecting. He'd have no place in wresting a fortune from the desert. *Tired of the alkali country*—that's the way he put it. Well, let him dream awhile longer over his trout stream! Hank Wheelock would show him; Hank Wheelock would give him a taste of real generosity! There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for his old partner, short of letting him have a hand in his

enterprise. A lovable old wastrel, this Jim Bledsoe, Hank Wheelock conceded. Take such an issue as dividing up, for instance. It was characteristic, this yielding everything, even the pack animal. If it hadn't been that he could repay this gesture tenfold, Hank Wheelock would have stuck to his first protest. Perhaps he should have, anyway. What if Jim Bledsoe were one day to say:

"Hank Wheelock ain't done nuthin' more'n he should. Didn't I turn over the whole shebang to him—pack mule and all, just before he struck it rich?"

Oh, well, if it gave Jim Bledsoe any satisfaction! . . . He'd likely find some excuse to horn in on the deal. Folks were like that—unwilling to concede unalloyed liberality.

After all, the camp equipment and the pack animal did mean something at this stage. He'd have a bit of travelling about to do. To begin with, he'd have to go into Potterville to attend to a thousand legal details, after he had staked his claim properly. He'd have to look people up, talk to them, get their interest. Yesterday, under the spell of his outstanding discovery, he had thought in terms of quickly matured plans; he saw now that weeks, months must elapse before they would swing forward. And he'd need a handful of money for the preliminaries, too. If the country back of Antelope had only yielded a decent pocket of ore! Perhaps if he pushed on a little farther. He knew a huddle of hills just beyond Mesquite Ridge that he had always thought of as promising.

He decided to start at daybreak. A fever of anxiety suddenly swept him. With the postponement of his triumph came a sickening fear that he had over-estimated the whole circumstance. What if the outcropping he had come upon were just that and nothing more? If veins of gold could swell deceitfully on the surface and peter out, why couldn't borax do the same? It wasn't likely, leastways he'd never heard of it, but it might! One always thought of borax marshes as the dried beds of inland seas, but he supposed they could be as easily the wash of prehistoric puddles. But it wasn't likely, he repeated again and again.

But even as he reassured himself a more fantastic idea consumed him. Could it be possible that the whole thing was a mental fabrication? Was the first suspicion which

had swept him as he bent over that patch of unexpected whiteness the right one? He had fancied then that the heat had touched him. Suddenly the canvas of his memory became crowded with brief hallucinations that had been the portion of desert rovers. The visions they had testified to!—incredible, alluring, ridiculous visions! He remembered them all, every one, with diabolical clearness.

His first plan had been to achieve Mesquite Ridge by a direct route that would have struck a little north of his discovery of yesterday, missing it by a half day's journey. There hadn't seemed any necessity for going out of his way merely to view a spot that he had quitted not twenty-four hours since. It would still be there, no matter what happened, and time was precious. But now, shaken by cold gusts of incredulity, he decided to take the longer route. He wanted to rest a moment in the shelter of that little mound of rock, and test once again with his fingers the reality of that sun-bleached pool that had so captured his fancy.

He broke camp without waiting for the sun to rise. Everything he possessed was loaded upon the protesting burro. His return was problematical. If he found that he *had* been snared by a vision, why——

But he refused to consider seriously such a contingency. Yet as he swung his footsteps eastward he had a sense of sickening dread that he could not define.

Toward evening the jutting ledge of rock which marked Hank Wheelock's spot of promise swam in the haze of a slanting sun. For a moment he leaned upon his rifle, motionless. The pack animal halted, too, making an inanimate outline against the sky. A thin curl of smoke drew upward in a straight line and mysteriously lost itself. . . . His first thought marked it as the camp fire of Indians. He felt annoyed. He had counted on solitude, and a brood of Indians was not to his liking. The alternative was even more distasteful: a white man would insist on chattering. . . . *A white man!* Had somebody already jumped his claim?

He felt wrath pounding at his temples, and, suddenly, instinctively, he began to run forward, his gun glistening with flashing menace. A figure scrambled from the sands to meet him.

"Wal, stranger, what's the hurry? . . . Don't yer calculate to stop at no flag stations?"

Hank Wheelock fell back. "I was all-fired thirsty!" he lied, conscious of two eyes riveted upon a thin trickle of moisture issuing from his canteen.

"Which way yer headed for?"

"Over by Mesquite Ridge."

"Prospectin'?"

"Yep."

Hank Wheelock shuffled to the water hole and bent over. "Which way *you* goin'?" he shot out, putting his lips to the moisture in his cupped palm.

The stranger stirred his miniature camp fire.

"I ain't made up my mind," he announced, with a cryptic chuckle.

Hank eyed his man grimly, but he had wit enough to lapse almost at once into a show of indifference. He straightened up slowly, casting his glance in the direction of the thing that he had travelled all day in the blistering heat to confirm. If he were mad before, his mind was still touched—the outcropping of borax glistened even in the twilight with emphatic whiteness. The stranger was bending over the fire. A primitive gust swept Hank Wheelock: he grasped his gun securely, but the next instant relaxed his grip, shaken further by the realization that he could turn yellow even for so brief a moment. The man had risen.

"Wal," he drawled, "I expect it's about time to chew!"

Hank wiped the sweat from his eyes, accepting the stranger's implied invitation with equal indirection, as he said:

"I guess I'd better unpack that fool burro if we calc'late to eat without jackass music."

The stranger's name was Starbuck—a garrulous, cynical soldier of fortune with the gossip of boom town and mining camp and trail bubbling up unceasingly. He had inside stories of clean-ups and collapses, and racy anecdotes of prominent citizens grown suddenly respectable overnight by the magic of money, or old age, or pure expediency. Listening to the suave ripple of incidents flowing from his lips, Hank Wheelock grew profoundly irritated. Here was a man that one felt knew too much, whose grasp of the inconsequential

seemed vaguely significant, with a chuckling humour capable of diabolical disillusionments. . . . For Hank Wheelock was still a childlike soul in spite of his worldly contacts—a man with enough buoyancy of spirit to be forced upward instead of swamped by the ugly currents of life.

This man Starbuck was sly, too; one got that in his half-closed glance, and there was something in the curve of his lip which seemed pregnant with ridicule. Hank Wheelock was burning to know whether thirst was the only thing that had lured him to this water hole, and having slaked it, what held him there. Surely he had experience enough to know borax when he saw it. Yet on this significant point he was strangely silent. . . . No, not strangely, when Hank came to think of it. Being no doubt possessed of the secret, Starbuck was as intent on guarding it as Hank himself.

Hank ate sparingly of Starbuck's bacon and beans, keeping his gun within easy reach. The impulse toward cold-blooded murder which had seized him earlier had vanished utterly, but he was ready this time for a fair fight, if he felt himself forced to it. He had rights which he was prepared to defend, and the thought thrilled him.

He tried discreetly once or twice to force Starbuck's vapourings into significant channels when suddenly, without warning, Starbuck himself rippled toward the desired explanation of his presence. They had finished their meal and their first pipes when Starbuck began to pack his mess kit with slow deliberation.

"Might as well be ready to move when I take the notion," he said.

Wheelock's heel dug into the sand. "What's your hurry?"

"Hurry? . . . No, I ain't exactly in a hurry. . . . But I jest swung a few miles out o' my course to-day to have a look at this here spot. Things on the desert stay pretty much as they were at the start. It's bin twenty years or more since I come by here."

"And yer mean ter say yer found nuthin' changed—*nuthin'?*"

"Not a damned thing!" He threw a greasewood twig in the direction of one of the piles of rock with which Hank Wheelock fantastically had staked his claim. "Excepting

them fool monuments!" He gave a chuckle. "When I seen them I looked around for a skeleton or two. Sez I to myself: 'Bud Starbuck, nobody but a tenderfoot done anything *that* foolish.'"

Hank Wheelock felt his face dyed slowly with a flush midway between anger and confusion. Could it be possible that this man suspected who was responsible for this futile and childish performance? He slapped his thigh ruminatingly, trying to frame a disarming reply.

"No, nuthin' changed in twenty years," he heard Starbuck drone on, "excepting them fool monuments and the sand shifting back and forth. . . . Now in the timber country you'd find trees growed bigger, or split by lightning, or mebbe a creek bed widened. But *here!*" He threw his shoulders upward with a lift of lively disgust.

A strange dryness puckered Hank Wheelock's lips—something like premonition urged him to complete silence, as if such a course might check the flow of Starbuck's speech, and yet he found himself saying almost hoarsely:

"How'd yer come to think o' stopping at all? . . . Ain't nuthin' here so all-fired unusual! . . . Leastways, nuthin' that would make a man remember that fur back."

"Wal, mebbe you'd think different if you'd drove a mule team past this water hole twice a week or more for nigh on to a year like I did. . . . Yes, sir, I passed this place more times than I could shake a stick at back in them days when I was hauling borax out o' Paiute Valley."

Hank Wheelock bent forward suddenly. "Borax!" he echoed faintly.

"Yes siree, borax. . . . He picked up another twig and hurled it this time in the midst of the crystalline pool, upon which Hank Wheelock was gazing with tragic uncertainty. "Yer see that? . . . Would yer like to know something about how it come there? Well, listen ter me, stranger, and when I get through if yer don't agree that nuthin' ever changes in this fool country, my name won't be Bud Starbuck!"

Some time in the night with the rising moon, Hank Wheelock heard the clinking of a mess kit swaying rhythmically, and he knew that Starbuck had hit the trail again. He was

wide awake, but he did not stir; he did not even call out a farewell: he had had enough of Bud Starbuck. It was not so much that this man had robbed him of an illusion as that he had convicted him of idiocy. Fancy a seasoned prospector letting himself be snared by anything so obviously fictitious as this outcropping of borax! What could he have been thinking of! After all, he hadn't made a fool of himself to Jim Bledsoe—his humiliation, bitter as it was, would at least always be self-contained. . . . Unless Bud Starbuck suspected! . . . And there were moments when Hank Wheelock fancied that he did.

He had told his story with suspicious gusto, as if he were inwardly smiling, and at the end his "I'd like ter clap my eyes on the greenhorn that reared up them there stone monuments" had been significant with contempt. The very memory of it still made Hank Wheelock wince.

It was a well-told tale and the element of extravagance was in it despite its underlying triteness. Bud Starbuck had the gift of vitalizing his narrative, and Hank Wheelock had been captured at once by the picture of the narrator setting out with his mule team on a wind-swept morning twenty years before to haul borax from Paiute Valley to the railroad siding. A fool thing to do in such a sandstorm, according to Starbuck's own statement! But bravado lay back of it, an answer to a carelessly flung challenge, with a wager to add zest to the performance—some fifty dollars for the delivery within a given time of the load at its destination. A hard-fought battle through blinding wind and sand, with a snapped axle almost within sight of victory. Then the load dumped in a little saucer-like depression near the water hole, the maimed wagon trailing to shelter behind staggering mules like some wounded animal dragged unwittingly to slaughter. Next day rehabilitation and the mules trotting back with their rattling "empty" and Bud Starbuck intent on plans for salvaging the abandoned load.

And the finish—to quote Bud Starbuck himself:

"Covered up jest as clean as if some fool grave-digger had been at work. . . . I'd 'lowed that there ledge of rock would shunt off the whirling sand. But no siree, it jest jumped *that*—as pretty. . . . Yes, stranger, the sand's the only thing changes in this dern country, and then it just

skips about like grasshoppers. . . . That borax has bin there nigh on to twenty years—jest waiting fer another fool wind to uncover it. . . . And I'm willing to bet if I was to load that up again, it wouldn't be ten pounds lighter —no siree, not ten pounds!"

Could any tale have been more commonplace, more ridiculous, more extravagant, all in one breath? It was so obvious and simple, once it was told. . . . Why, Hank Wheelock didn't have to so much as look again to realize how shallow and artificial and altogether unconvincing of promise was this little glistening patch of crystal winking its thousand eyes mockingly in the sunlight. . . . What was Jim Bledsoe doing up by Heron Falls?—gentle, kindly, simple Jim Bledsoe. . . . If he might only wake to-morrow to the sizzling of bacon in the pan and the sweetish smell of trout browning to a turn! . . .

He lay all the next day in the imperfect shadow of the ledge of rock watching the buzzards circling overhead. At intervals he ministered to the thirsty needs of his pack animal with patient scooping of moisture from the water hole, but for himself, he was content to drowse in a feverish retrospection. . . . Nightfall . . . another day . . . a procession of sunsets and dawns. . . . He was tired—that was it—all-fired tired! To-morrow he would start in the direction of Mesquite Ridge, but not to-day! . . . Again and again he dulled the faint urge within him with this promise, and as often let it be strangled slowly by inaction. Overhead the buzzards grew into a black and menacing cloud. . . . Well, they screened the sun, anyway, he would mutter, closing his eyes. The pack animal brayed pitifully! What did it matter? . . . He would start to-morrow! And thus one day merged into another without circumstance or change or human visitation, until in the faint flush of a wind-blown dawn he saw the figure of old Jim Bledsoe drifting forward in a gilded haze.

Jim Bledsoe's bacon and coffee had never tasted so good. They were like a miraculous sacrament that could revive the spirit as well as the body. With every gulp of muddy coffee, Hank Wheelock could feel the sense of proportion and reality return. But above the physical content which

was stealing over him there rose a suspicion of Jim Bledsoe's presence, a premonition that this old partner of his had sought him out deliberately for some sly purpose he could not define. It all came out, finally, at the appointed time for men's revelations—over the inevitable and pungent pipes. It was Jim Bledsoe who opened fire.

"I warn't at all sure I'd ketch yer," he broke out, suddenly, without warning.

"How'd yer know I was here?"

"I met a man working up toward Windgate—Bud Starbuck. He said he'd seen yer. . . . But he 'lowed you'd be headin' for Mesquite by this time. . . . But, I dunno, somethin' seemed to tell me you was right here. . . . O' course, I could have waited at camp, but things looked so sort of cleaned-out there—as if you'd bolted fer a spell. . . . I jest couldn't sit there and wait, so I sez to myself: 'If he ain't at that there water hole, I'll follow him up.'"

Hank Wheelock felt the necessity for explanation. "I was aimin' to leave to-day. . . . Somethin' I eat must have put me off my feed. I jest felt all-fired ornery. . . . Were yer calculatin' to swing over to Mesquite with me?"

Jim Bledsoe shook his head and a little gurgling note of triumph issued from his throat.

"No, siree, not me. 'Twarn't for that reason I trotted after yer. . . . But I was jest like a fool woman—bustin' to tell yer the news. . . ." He cleared his throat. "Hank Wheelock, you and me don't have to go traipsin' around this here alkali no more, tryin' to hog-tie fortune. I struck somethin' up in that Heron Falls country jest like I said I would. . . . Oh, it ain't nuthin' suddin—I've bin flirting round with it fer nigh on to six months, now. . . . Yes, siree, fishing ain't the only thing I done up there. . . . I jest laid low and said nuthin', working it all up on the sly. . . . Well, I got a man ready to give me a quarter of a million ter hand over my option. . . . O' course, he'll pull out ten times that. . . . But I figgered you and me couldn't spend much more'n he offered before we cashed in." He gave a chuckle. "Leastways, not onless we got a couple of gals to give us a hand."

Hank Wheelock drew viciously on his pipe. A quarter of a million! . . . Old Jim Bledsoe! It was incredible!

But more incredible still was the simplicity of including a partner who had so unceremoniously cut adrift from him. Hank had no words of gratitude to meet such a situation, so instead he found himself saying, with almost a sneer:

"I don't see where *I* come in, *now!*"

"Say, yer don't think fer one moment, Hank Wheelock, I'd hold out on yer jest because yer kicked over the traces once in forty years? I'll allow I was sore—at furst! . . . But, pshaw, it ain't as if you and me was strangers. . . . Besides, I know what you'd ha' done if you'd bin in my place!"

A flush spread over Hank Wheelock's face: the sort of flush that used to rise when as a boy his mother had imputed undeserved virtues to him. A sudden and secret shame overwhelmed him, and the bitter truth rose perversely to his lips.

"Oh, yer do, do yer!" he sneered. "Well, let me tell yer one thing, yer wrong! . . . If you'd ditched me, Jim Bledsoe, I'd ha' let yer starve—that's what I'd ha' done!"

He stopped, amazed at the lengths to which his self-contempt had swung him. In the stillness that followed he had a sense that he was hanging upon Jim Bledsoe's reply with drowning desperation.

Jim Bledsoe shook his head. "Yer don't have to tell me, Hank Wheelock—I know what I'm talking about!"

For a moment the feeling of relief which swept him was almost painful. It wasn't any use telling Jim Bledsoe the truth. Why bother, then? What folks didn't know wouldn't sicken them. He might just as well share in the prospects. *A quarter of a million!* At last he could take it easy!

But this gust of satisfaction passed swiftly and left him as chilled as when he had stood, with his finger on the trigger of his gun, watching Starbuck bending over the fire. . . . No, it couldn't be done: it wasn't sporting! He'd been a gambler all his life and he'd made mistakes, but he'd never cheated. He couldn't horn in on a game he'd dropped out of; he couldn't keep on playing when he knew that there had been a misdeal. A passed hand was a passed hand. And a dissolved partnership was *dissolved:* there wasn't nothing else to it. Besides, a man had his pride. *He* wasn't no

beggar! . . . He wasn't dead yet, neither, and there were just as good claims in the hills as ever were dug.

He scrambled to his feet and he knew that his voice was clear and cold and triumphant as he lied:

"Wal, I've got some news fer you, too. . . . You ain't the only one's bin working on the sly. . . . I got somethin' pretty nice staked out over in that Mesquite Range. . . . It won't be a quarter of a million, but it will be enough—fer me!"

Jim Bledsoe rose more slowly. "Jest as you say. . . . But I don't feel comfortable, somehow. . . . We was partners, yer know, when I fust came on to that holdin'. I should have told yer right off."

A hot breeze began to catch up little whirls of sand and loose the pungent odours of the sagebrush. An intolerable longing for some far-off and dusky coolness oppressed Hank Wheelock. He thought of hedgerows and columbine and hollyhocks and the faint tinkle of silver fountains.

"Yes, siree!" he heard Jim Bledsoe repeating, in a tone of self-rebuke. "I should have told you right off!"

Hank Wheelock turned his face upward to the lifted circle of buzzards wheeling expectantly in the turquoise expanse. A flicker of indecision sputtered and died. He nodded in the direction of the Mesquite Range and his voice shook with the triumph of a gambler who scorned a secret advantage as he said:

"That's my case, exactly! . . . Yer see—it's jest horse and horse!"

PROFESSOR BOYNTON REREADS HISTORY

By EDITH R. MIRRIELEES

From *Atlantic Monthly*

AT TEN minutes before twelve, according to his daily custom, Professor Boynton got up from his study table, stretched his arms vigorously once or twice above his early gray head, and strolled out through the open door of his study to the veranda. At its farther end his daughter Helen was sitting between two of her high-school classmates, all three surrounded by a sea of books and notebooks and scattered papers.

"Why didn't you ever have me learn any history when I was little, Father?" she reproached him, as he came up the porch. "When you used to teach it——"

Boynton let himself down into the hammock behind her. "Probably that's why. Whether you teach it or whether you write it, you find out how much of it isn't so. What's the examination this time?"

"She isn't giving an examination; it's a question we're to write on for Monday. 'In your opinion, what has Magna Carta given to West Brookins?' She means, what's lasted that we get out of it."

"She's chosen a good place to put the question," Boynton commented. "Now if she were teaching in San Francisco, and trying to find what fragments they still had—— What are you deciding?"

"We haven't finished yet, but there are three things—— What is it, Mother?"

Mrs. Boynton had been putting last touches on the lunch table inside. She came to the door now.

'Nothing. Only I wanted to tell your father something.

Edward—Parker hasn't done a thing toward getting that wall down. He came over to say Mrs. Parker was sick and he couldn't. Mrs. Thornley says they were chasing each other around and screaming half the night, last night."

"Where on earth do they get it?" Boynton wondered, briefly. "Sick" for the Parkers had a definite meaning. "I thought she was sent up for a cure of some kind last month?"

"I thought so, too, but she got off. But what I started to say was this: he went out through the back entry, and when I looked, your garden coat was gone. He was the only person here."

"I'll kill that old scoundrel one of these days," Boynton threatened, more amused than angry. "I like that coat. I wonder if Thornley'd mind getting it back for me."

He went in to the telephone and found the number.

"Thornley? This is Boynton speaking. Thornley, Parker stole a coat from me this morning. A brown one. . . . Yes. Yes, I knew they'd been at it again. Mrs. Thornley told us. If he's over there working on your lawn, I wonder if you'd mind telling him to leave the coat there till I can get it? He can't have had time to do anything with it yet. And you might mention to him, too, that if he sets foot on my place again, I'll save expense and shoot him on sight. Last time it was my best trowel. . . . Oh, over in Brookins, I suppose. You know what law enforcement amounts to over there. . . . Yes, she's worse than he is."

He came back laughing to the porch.

"Now, there's a question, Helen, that Magna Carta didn't settle. When it comes to a town like this, 90 per cent. of it law-abiding, home-owning professionals, having to stagger along with neighbours like the Parkers—— You young people staying to lunch?"

They were near the end of the meal when Mrs. Boynton, who was facing the open door, motioned through it.

"Look, Edward! It's both of them."

Outside, the two Parkers, the official derelicts of West Brookins, were coming waveringly along the pavement, arm in arm. Three or four small boys derided safely from a distance.

It was the boys Boynton saw first. He got up instantly.

"Oh, come, we can't have that! Why, he's a man as old as I am! She's going round to the back, Cara. . You head her off and I'll go down and speak to him."

Parker had turned in behind the hedge with which the Boyntons were replacing a partly torn down brick wall. Behind it, he was out of sight from the house, and remembering the three girls at the table, Boynton hurried, with the charitable purpose of saving him the embarrassment of an audience.

"Where's that coat, Parker?" he demanded, as he came into hearing.

"What coat, Mr. Boynton?"

"Now, look here," Boynton ordered, with exasperation, "you know what coat as well as I do. Haven't you just come from Thornley's? Didn't he tell you I said I'd finish you if you came near this place again without bringing it back? If you haven't it——"

"I don't know about no coat, Mr. Boynton. I don't know what you're talking about. Mr. Thornley, he come out an' said somethin', but I didn't know——"

The sentence went unfinished. Boynton, facing the speaker from the other side of the pile of bricks, had turned his eyes away in a sort of vicarious shame at his protestations. As the words broke off, he was conscious of something, he hardly knew what—a kind of concussion, a sense of violent disturbance to which there was yet attached no movement. The man in front of him flung up his hands with a choking grunt and crumpled forward. Instinctively, Boynton caught at him as he fell, but he broke through his hold, a dead weight, and dropped across the bricks. On Boynton's hands and his cuffs blood had flicked itself in sickening red blots. The still sunny lane, with its signs of peaceable labour, was suddenly a place of horror.

And then at once the stillness was broken. Mrs. Parker rushed round the end of the hedge. She threw herself on the thing on the ground, howling and wailing, pulling at it, grotesque, unhuman. Mrs. Boynton had run out, too, and Helen and her friends, and two men from the street, and Boynton knew that he must have cried out, though he had not meant to do so.

The two men dragged Mrs. Parker up and bent over the body. They babbled together of a doctor, though all of them knew in advance that the thing on the ground was dead. Nothing living could have had that look. In the press and sudden confusion Mrs. Boynton was the only one who had a definite intention. She caught hold of Boynton's sleeve.

"Come into the house. They'll look out for things. You have to get—to get this off you."

She would have accompanied him into the bathroom, but he stopped her at the door. "I have to have a minute to pull myself together. I'll be down directly. What on earth was it that happened to him!"

Inside, he turned on all the taps. It seemed to him he could never get water enough on his hands. When his hands were clean he pulled off his cuffs and let them drop on the floor, and scrubbed his fingers again after touching them. He could not bear to put the befouled things into the laundry hamper, but with his foot he pushed them out of sight behind the tub.

By the time he came downstairs, the knot of people in the lane had disappeared. Mrs. Boynton was sitting on the porch, and Helen, with scared, reddened eyes, was leaning against her knees. Boynton had recovered enough to be paternal and soothing. He sat on the steps for a few minutes, talking over the grotesque tragedy.

"Poor old soul, I wish I hadn't harried him about that coat. He was always honest enough when we was sober. They've taken him to the morgue, I suppose?—— Well, we'd better get back to work, hadn't we, little daughter? There's no advantage to him in our spoiling an afternoon."

Inside his study his mind refused to apply itself to work. In spite of him, it flashed back again and again to that minute in the lane. He got up and walked up and down the room, puzzling. "What happened to him? What on earth happened to him?" Toward the middle of the afternoon, when he heard a masculine voice answering Mrs. Boynton's, he took advantage of hearing to stroll out from his seclusion. Their next-door neighbour, Judge Bolling—a judge long since retired—was filling one of the porch chairs. Boynton greeted him briefly.

"Oh, yes, I'm working, but I heard you out here, and I was wondering—Cara, I suppose somebody's looking out for Mrs. Parker? She wouldn't have many friends to fall back on."

"They took her to the hospital."

"That's good. If you think one of us ought to go over——"

"I don't." Mrs. Boynton flushed crimson as she spoke. "I've heard from her. Edward, she—she's——"

"Might as well say it, Cara," the judge advised. He turned round, laughing.

"You ought to know, Boynton, you're hovering on the edge of the gallows. I was telling Cara just before you came out. Mrs. Parker——"

Mrs. Boynton cut in on the sentence. "She says she heard you say, 'I told you I'd finish you if you came on my place,' and then——"

"Why, yes. Yes, that's what I did say," Boynton corroborated. He grasped the other part of the idea slowly. "Do you mean she has the effrontery—the—the assurance——"

Their guest laughed again, more reassuringly than before. "She's still two thirds over. Wait till we see what she says when she's sober.—Funny thing is, what was the matter with him? Do you suppose one of those boys who were following——"

"I haven't the smallest idea. I'd think he had a fit and struck his head when he fell, only I saw the blood before that. I tried to catch him, and it was all over me."

"If I were you, I'd forget about seeing it beforehand," the ex-judge suggested, casually.

He had been gone an hour or two and it was nearly dinner time before the force of his suggestion struck home to Boynton's mind. He commented on it indignantly to his wife and daughter while they ate.

"A man like Bolling, too! That's the worst of having anything to do with the courts, even as far up as he was. I've never had to testify at an inquest, and naturally I've always kept clear of getting on juries or anything of that kind; but as to using any subterfuge to get out of testifying——"

By the next morning, though, his attention had been diverted to newer reasons for indignation. Mrs. Parker was still too ill to leave her bed, and the inquest was being postponed for her, but her pre-inquest statements, as they seeped

out by way of hospital attendants and doctors, were voluminous. She had heard the damning words, she had seen the brick picked up, the blow struck. She breathed out fire and threatenings between relapses into post-alcoholic grief. The news of her accusations was all over West Brookins. From early breakfast-time the Boynton telephone rang continually as prelude to messages satirical or humorous. Even families in Brookins, the town to which West Brookins was a remote and superior suburb, had heard and added their messages to the nearer ones. Boynton, going out to the box to mail a letter in the middle of the morning, found Mrs. Boynton waiting in the study for him when he came back.

"I don't know whether you'll like it, Edward; I've just had a 'phone from Charlie."

"If I don't like it, I suppose you won't have had it. What does Charlie have to say? Offer to defend me?"

"Something like that. He said he was coming down as soon as he could get out of court, and—and to keep you from talking."

"To *keep* me from it?"

"That's what it sounded like. The 'phone wasn't working very well."

"That's probably what it was," Boynton agreed. "It has the ring of Charlie's advice. Well, run along, dear, and I'll get back to writing. Let me know if he favours us with any more suggestions."

Inwardly, though, he was pleased. Charlie was his younger brother and in a mild way the black sheep of the family. That is, he had given up an irreproachable law practice in Los Angeles for the sake of criminal practice in San Francisco, and had added to that the extra offence of taking a somewhat holier-than-thou attitude over the change.

"It'll be good for him," Boynton mused, while he glanced over the notes on his desk. "To come racing down and find us all going about our business—— It's what I've tried to tell him about those clients of his he gets so excited over. If a man lives in a decent place and leads a decent life, he's out of reach of accidents. Now with me——"

He let his mind go, house by house, down the street. There were people he disliked in some of the houses, people no doubt who disliked him; but there was not one house of them all—

he knew it perfectly—in which the ravings of Mrs. Parker could meet with any reception except indignant incredulity.

It was pleasant, though, all the same, that the telephone kept up its friendly clamour, that Mrs. Boynton on the porch was holding what amounted to an impromptu reception. Two or three times Boynton strolled out to add his greetings to his wife's.

"To let you see the villain of the piece," he explained his coming. He was good-humouredly qualified in his comments on Mrs. Parker. "Poor old wreck! In her condition no telling what she would see! No, I don't blame her; the people I do blame are the town authorities. A little more sense of responsibility on their part——"

Charlie arrived just before dinner, a smaller man than his brother—hawk-nosed, black-haired. Through the meal they kept chiefly to family topics. Even in the study afterward the newcomer fended off discussion until Mrs. Boynton, leaning forward in her chair, taxed him directly:

"Is it Helen and I that are the difficulty, Charlie? Would you rather talk to Edward by himself?"

He gave her his first unqualified smile. "Could I? It's a sort of a professional prejudice of mine. You don't mind?"

He got up to open the door for her and came back from it to the fireplace, where he stood staring down at the logs.

"Well, what do you think, Sherlock?" Boynton challenged him.

"I think you're in a hole."

"Did you actually take it seriously enough to come down from San Francisco on account of this?"

"I did."

"Now that," Boynton commented, "is what criminal practice does for the mind. I might be in a hole if I were a tramp picked up on Pacific Street—I admit that; but here in West Brookins——"

"It's exactly that 'here in West Brookins' that worries me. Did you really tell the fellow you'd kill him?"

"Why, as far as that goes——"

"Did you or didn't you?"

Boynton got up, too. "Look here, I'm not on the witness

stand. If you've come down with any idea of cross examining me——"

"Oh, tell it your own way, Ed," the younger brother agreed, resignedly, and Boynton ran rapidly through the narrative of Parker's death. When he had finished, Charlie came back to his chair and sat down in the circle of light from the lamp, leaning his arms on the table.

"And you still don't think you're in a hole—after telling me all that?"

"I know I'm not."

"You said you'd kill him and said it in the presence of witnesses and repeated it over the telephone. Then you were alone with him when he dropped dead; his blood was all over you, and the widow——"

"Well, do you believe I did it?"

"That's not the question."

"It's exactly the question. I tell you, Charlie, you couldn't get any intelligent man in West Brookins—no, nor in Brookins, either, though it's not a place I'm fond of—to believe a thing like that. Not any more than you'd believe it yourself. The evidence wouldn't matter; they'd *know* it wasn't true."

"You couldn't get a change of venue?"

"There isn't any question of 'venue.' You talk as though I'd been held——"

His audience seemed not to hear. "I never lived in this particular town, of course, but most of them—— How big a place is it?"

"Three thousand, I believe—*West* Brookins, that is. Brookins is larger."

"That's about what I thought. See here; I knew exactly how you'd treat the thing—that's why I came down; but we've got to take it seriously. It *is* serious! Any lawyer'd tell you so. This business of being a valued old resident that you seem to be depending on to keep you out of trouble——"

"And that will!"

"Sure of it?"

"Of course I'm sure of it."

The questioner drew in a deep breath. "Well—maybe! But where do you get it, Ed?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"That 'first-citizen' stuff? Oh, I'm not trying to hurt your feelings. I'm trying to find out. What do you do in Brookins—I don't mean the United States; I mean right here in West Brookins—to keep them all so certain about you? Vote once in a while?"

"I always vote."

"I know you do—for President. Vote in the last town election?"

"I don't remember——"

"I remember all right—even if I wasn't here. You meant to and you thought you would and you didn't know anything about either of the candidates, and it looked like rain, and you sat right here and let 'em elect anybody they good and pleased; and now you'll get tried for murder by those same good and pleased parties."

Boynton laughed. It was an effort to do it, for he was angry, but he made the effort.

"It's a beautiful peroration, Charlie. It's a pity it's wasted. Even an ex-professor knows that town officials don't try for murder."

"Any idea who binds you over to the superior court? Oh, I don't say a police judge could help it on the evidence, but I do say he won't break his heart over it—not with one of the little high-and-mighties from West Brookins. If you think the cheapest skate there is likes being elected and run by the scum of a town—— Know any of the police judges?"

"I've never had occasion to."

"Or the town marshal? Or the coroner, for that matter? Then you don't know the kind of men you're up against. If you want my advice——"

"I seem to be getting it."

"You're going to get it. You won't take it, but you're going to get it, all right. If I were where you are, I'd do one of two things: either I'd get a theory about that killing and I'd work it for all it was worth, or else I'd get out. Nobody'd look very far for you."

"You mean—go into hiding?"

"It don't matter what you call it. Go on a visit if you want to. Just get out of the way for a while till there's time to look around. And do it now while you've the chance to do it."

"If your other clients——"

"I'm not helping you as a client; I'm helping you as a brother. I'm scared, Ed. That's the truth. If anything I can say can get you away——"

"It can't."

"I knew it," Charlie acknowledged, regretfully. "I hand it to you as far as that goes. That French-Revolution-Charles-the-First stunt is the one you first citizens always pull when you get into trouble. All right, that's ended—though I still hope you change your mind before morning. What about the widow? Young? Pretty? Well, I don't know which is worse—that, or old and feeble, prop of her declining years removed. You needn't laugh. If you'd had as much experience as I have——"

"You've had entirely too much, Charlie," Boynton agreed. This time his laughter was sincere. "You're trying the case down on Kearney Street. What you overlook is that, even if there should be some preliminary unpleasantness—I don't believe there will be—still, I have a safe resort. Nothing can go very far without being passed on by a jury. I know enough law for that."

"It's the jury you're depending on?"

"It's precisely that."

"You think if the widow took the stand and swore to what she'd heard you say, and cried and had hysterics——"

"I think it wouldn't make the slightest difference. I've lived here twelve years; any jury you could get, any dozen men picked at random——"

His brother repeated the words thoughtfully after him. "'Any jury picked at random?' All right—we'll pick 'em; enough to show what I mean. Got a telephone book? It won't be a perfectly fair sample, but it'll give us an idea. Here, I'll read the names off."

He turned to the A's under West Brookins. "ABRAMS, ADAMS, ADAMSON——"

"There's a good place to stop," Boynton interrupted the reading. He spoke good-naturedly with an obvious desire not to insist on his triumph. "Any one of those three or all of them. Adams and I have played chess together for years. And Abrams——"

"Abrams the one that writes the law textbooks?"

"Yes. He was at the State University when I was, and ever since——"

"Ever serve on a jury yourself?"

"I'm exempt. As a teacher——"

"It's ten or twelve years since you did any teaching."

"Teaching is my profession, though, and naturally——" He saw the application of the question and was silent.

"What does Adams do?"

"He's a doctor."

"That exempts him. Adamson?"

"He's retired now. He was formerly counsel——"

"Exempt, then."

He read off three more names. At the end of the next three he got up and moved his chair over to his brother's.

"It'll be quicker to run down the page and check the exceptions. Know AGNEW?—ALLEN, A. R.?—ALLEN, R. N.?—ALLIGER?"

"Alliger? I don't know any Alliger—— Oh, yes, he does odd jobs. He brought me some fertilizer once."

"And you probably objected to the price and he's had it in for you ever since. He'll be eligible—ALSBERG?"

They had turned one page and were halfway down the second before Boynton raised his head from above the book.

"I think we needn't go any farther. I think I see your point."

"Let's see what we've got, then: one odd-jobs man; one truck farmer—he may get off, it's just a chance if we get him; one garbage man's helper; one you don't know; one delivery-wagon driver—— What'd you say about him? I've got him checked twice."

"I said I'd asked Breck to discharge him because of the way he got orders mixed. If he isn't feeble-minded——"

"He won't be too feeble-minded to remember that—you can bank on his having that much mind; nor too feeble-minded to get accepted, either, so long as he's outside an institution. You see what it comes down to. That's what brought me down as fast as I could travel. I didn't know anything about this town, but I knew what towns full of retired lawyers and bankers and professors and cultured classes generally are always like. Look at Boston! Rottenest city government—— You wouldn't think now of what I said a

while ago about going off for a visit for a while? It's just till we'd have time to get our hands on some clues and get in first with them. When you're up against a combination like this——"

Professor Boynton got to his feet. His face was suddenly as old as his gray hair. He swallowed hard before he spoke.

"No," he said. He stood looking down into the fire. "It's Helen I'm thinking of, of course. She's just at that age—— But no! Whatever I've done——"

"But it's what you haven't done! Good God, Ed, if you'd done anything to him——"

"I don't mean that," Boynton said. For a little while he resumed his contemplation of the fire. "What I mean is this: all my life I've prided myself on being a good citizen. If I haven't been——" He paused. "Since I haven't been, to take the consequences of not being——"

"But you couldn't have turned the thing—not single-handed."

"I could have helped. In a place as small as this, if I'd set the example——" He stopped: the telephone, which had been quiet longer than at any other time in the day, was ringing again. "Cara's gone upstairs, I think. I'll answer it."

"*I'll* answer it! The less you talk, the better. If it's anybody trying to get a statement out of you——" He went out to the instrument. Inside the study, his brother could hear the quick bark of his responses.

"Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . No, he can't come just now. This is his brother. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. *What!* . . . What's that? . . . Yes, I got you!"

There was a long listening silence. Then the receiver crashed down on the hook and Charlie came back into the study. His face was queerly mottled with red and his teeth ate at his unsteady lower lip.

"God's good to you, Ed! The widow got up when they weren't watching her and got hold of something she thought was whiskey. She's just made a statement in expectation of death. She threw the brick herself—came round from behind you. He'd been chasing her with a knife the night before and that was her answer. It was a Judge Somebody

telephoned. He said he and some of your other friends were coming over."

He stopped, waiting for his brother to answer, but Boynton said nothing.

"I think I'll duck out before they come. I've a meeting in town I oughtn't to cut if I can help it. . . . But I'm glad! You know that. I'm tickled to death. I could sit down and cry, just out of plain relief. You'll say good-bye to Cara for me, won't you? And the next time you get accused of murder or arson or kidnapping——"

But Professor Boynton, though he held his brother's hand longer than was usual with him, did not respond to the joking. When he was alone, he went to one of the bookcases and took down from it a little shabby brown-bound volume and turned its familiar leaves. The passage he turned to he could have repeated as well without the book as with it:

"No free man shall be taken or imprisoned or dispossessed, or outlawed, or banished, or in any way destroyed; nor will we go upon him, nor send upon him, except by the legal judgment of his peers. . . ."

The telephone book was still open on the desk. His eyes went from the page in front of him to the checked names on its list—to the names of the garbage man and the odd-jobs man and the driver of the delivery wagon.

"'His peers!'" Boynton quoted under his breath. "'By legal judgment of [my] peers.'" The colour flooded his face, even to his rim of gray hair. "My superiors! The men I've left alone at Runnymede!"

He was still holding the book between his fingers when the doorbell sounded and he went out to let in his other peers—the recreant barons of West Brookins.

THE SECRET AT THE CROSS-ROADS

By JEFFERSON MOSLEY

From *Forum*

IT WAS late in August. I had been attached to the General Medical Foundation since my professional graduation in June of the preceding year and was now on my way to a remote settlement known as Bell's Brake, where I was to continue my monotonous and personally distasteful routine of hookworm investigations. The inspiration of the physician's ideal seemed far-fetched to me that day, and its forlorn drudgeries their own reward.

Bell's Brake lies twenty miles west of Dalby, the nearest railway stop. At Dalby I hired horse and vehicle for ten days and set out across country according to schedule.

It was a hot, sandy plod all the afternoon, through typical bottom country, forest spaces alternating with rail-fenced corn and cotton clearings, and the light of other days broke on me in the colour, odour, and grand passiveness of it all. South is South, and emotionally I was in the heart of home. Nevertheless, I was a casual and transient through the particular region, and loneliness for things vanished took possession of me. I was jaded from long travel.

The accident that befell me about eight miles from Bell's was nothing extraordinary, but it brought on a futile delay. The rack-boned horse quietly pulled the swingletree in two, and I found myself without the means to repair. At last, however, an old Negro drove up in a tottering buckboard. He had a half roll of cotton bagging with him, and from the cordage around this and a hickory pole I had cut he accommodated me with an African's best splice. After losing a full hour I got under way again, precariously. It was nearing six

o'clock, and the sun was sinking. I wondered where I should be at midnight.

There is a curve in the road just before you reach the fork, five miles this side of Bell's. On the left is an undefined area of land once cleared but now run wild again, save for a clump of four or five half-tended graves. On the right stands a grove of live oaks, perfect of its kind. A swampy "branch" flows through it, leading the eye back into vistas of semi-gloom. The oaks spread their elephantine limbs wide and low, and the sluggish waters mirror long festoons of moss and muscadine. Frogs were beginning to chirp and grunt as I drove past, and spirals of mosquitoes were drifting out. A specimen of *culex pipiens* found me and wailed indefinitely in my ear.

But habitation of some sort met my eyes just around the turn. Nearest me suddenly appeared a group of outhouses, at the farther end of which was a larger unpainted board structure—a store, it seemed, with gable and porch facing the road. Just beyond, the fork branched off, past that, woods again. Someone was cooking supper—there was a rich, inviting smell of ham and coffee.

On the porch was a man in his shirt sleeves, seated in a slack posture, his chair propped against the wall. "J. H. R. Agard, DRUGS AND SPECIALTIES," the sign read, succinct and utterly vague. As I drew aside, the man on the porch arose with symptoms akin to those of lumbago, pivoting his steps at the knee. He took a stance against one of the posts, put his hands to his back, and expectorated.

"Good day," he addressed me, in a flat voice.

I answered and looked at him. He was small, sallow, and crestfallen in aspect. His eyes were dark and penetrating, yet curiously unexpressive, as though fencing for thoughts and exchanging distrust. He wore a wide-brimmed buff-coloured hat, and glossy celluloid collar and cuffs.

"Stranger in these parts?" he inquired, hitching himself a trifle nearer.

"Yes, at present," I admitted. "Are you the—proprietor here?"

"Well, you might say I am. . . . Hello, what's the matter with that s'ingletree? Where you headed for?"

"Bell's Brake."

"Bell's, huh?—Might' poor place, Bell's." He seemed to weigh some delicate proposal. "Tell you what you might do. Suppose you put up here to-night. Feed that hoss, eat supper, get a good night's rest. There's a shop down the fork a ways, have your buggy fixed up there. Care to stop? Agard's my name, Mr.——"

He had come to the point. I introduced myself and alighted.

"Oh, John!" Agard called. "Come over here—I want to ask you a favour."

"Comin' right now, Doctor. Yes, suh! Git up, *mule*." This ready reply came from a big-muscled Negro field hand who had ridden up the road behind me.

"John," said my host, "I want you to unharness this gentleman's horse for him, unload his baggage, and take his buggy down with you to Mr. Comer's shop. Tell him this gentleman had a breakdown on the road, and ask him if he can't put on a new s'ingletree soon in the mornin'."

"'Deed I will, Doctor," said John, beginning to unfasten the traces. Within five minutes he had mounted and started away, with a shaft in one hand.

"Look here, John," I suggested, "hadn't you better tie that thing to the saddle? You'll get pulled off."

"No, boss," he grinned, "I reckin I better take 'er dishere way—mule's got all *she* kin do to ca'y *me*. San's heavy rollin'. We'll git 'er dar all right!"

The two of them dragged my buggy away. I had forgotten to offer John a quarter. "He didn't expect one," said Doctor Agard. My heart began to warm. It was the kindly feeling of my boyhood; I was getting nearer home.

The doctor and I had supper in the small dwelling house near by. Agard was a bachelor, I learned.

Toward the end of the meal he excused himself and crow-hopped across the hallway into another room. He and the servant, a bedizened young Negress named Sarah, were talking there in a low tone for some minutes. As he returned, I saw his hand on the door and heard his dismal voice:

"You might as well get Number Four ready. . . . Yes, but you never can tell. And take those ear-rings off, like I told you."

The next I saw of him was in the drug store, making up a chill tonic for a late customer, the blacksmith's son. A couple of wall-lamps with tin reflectors showed a surprisingly neat stock of drugs and sundries, though with the usual excess of patent nostrums.

After young Comer left, Agard and I sat on the porch.

He kindled a smudge. I removed my coat, took a chew of his tobacco, and tilted back my chair. He had become so friendly that all my suspicion melted into a sensation of being at home. I knew the accent he spoke, could foretell his very phrases, make the responses—and the old stirring of the pines and the chirp of frogs set me aching for I know not what.

I told Agard why I was going to Bell's.

"Well, I expect you better start your treatment on me," he laughed. "I've been feelin' mighty no-account lately. Can't hardly keep up to my work a-tall."

I assured him that he hadn't the "hookworm look" about the eyes, but in my mind I was not so certain. I promised to leave him a test treatment if he so desired.

I was naturally curious about this man's medical education and practice. His being druggist and so-called "Doctor" in one would not pass as the conventional thing in some places. It savoured just a trifle of the quack. I wished to establish his ethical background.

I got a very candid story. He had started out as prescription clerk, he said, then druggist. He had been importuned again and again to recommend remedies, had seen a local need, and had "read medicine." He had attended brief sessions at Louisville, Kentucky. Though lacking a degree, he had passed the State licensing board's examination and was freely entitled to practise. He was not, however, a member of any regular medical association, so far as I could infer.

I persuaded myself that he was doing more good than harm, though as a rule I am opposed to all forms of empiricism in my profession.

We had sat for a half-hour or so, when he apologized that he had been losing a good deal of sleep and would have to "look around a little" and go to bed.

Just as I was rising to follow the hint, a gun went off somewhere in the woods. In the moment of silence that followed its echo there came to our ears a duller cadence, along the road

from the west—the monotonous plodding of heavy feet. Agard listened to this, and as it continued he hobbled in and came back with a lamp in his hand. Two men presently arrived in the lighted circle. Negroes again, one black as the ace of spades, the other yellow. Their faces were shining with sweat. They carried a tossing form between them on some sort of stretcher which they laid flat on the ground, grunting as they did so, then looked up toward the porch.

"Who's that?" Agard demanded.

"Bob Tolliver an' Morgan Luckett," the black one answered.

"You're Bob?"

"Yas, suh."

"Where you from?"

"Down Craney Bayou."

"Got your wife there?"

"No, suh, my sister, Pearline—Morgan's wife." Morgan seemed to shoulder some part of a man's responsibility at this. They stood looking up with foolish expectancy.

"When was she taken?"

" 'Bout sundown."

The nature of the case needed little explaining.

The doctor seemed to wrestle with some loathsome incubus. "Well," he concluded, smiling feebly at me, "I reckon you might as well take her to the back."

They lifted their burden again, and Morgan started up the front steps without more ado.

"Hold on there," Agard abruptly asserted himself. "Go around to that side gate. There's no way for you through here."

The mulatto backed away, muttering, whereupon Agard checked him peremptorily. It is a knack requiring practice and a clear-cut point of view.

"Mope along dar, Morgan, an' shet yo' damn' mouf," his brother-in-law mumbled urgently as they shuffled away.

"Sarah!" Agard called. "Side gate! Number Four fixed?"

The reply seemed to be in the affirmative.

He turned to me, complaining. "Woman drug in here from a saw-mill for me to look after. Seems like I never *can* get any rest. You go on and turn in—you'll find your room ready."

But I did not rush off to bed. Instead, I explained the propriety of my going to the "back" with him.

"No, no!" he protested, wretchedly.

It was as I had surmised: a "hospital," the most unprofessional thing of its kind I have ever beheld, a squatting-place for misery. A playhouse dispensary and operating room; two sheds in lieu of wards, with two-tiered board bunks along each wall. An imbecile black hag in one room, whimpering for cocaine; in the other, a care-free son of Ham who, from some incentive, had reached a hand under a logging locomotive. Dearth of linen; the cases lay on unsheeted oilcloth; dismal kerosene lamps, and remnants of greasy victuals on tin plates.

Pearline was brought in. She was made as easy as possible in the bunk referred to as "Number Four," which Sarah had by some process made "ready." The case was well advanced but not yet urgent. Agard sent the two men on their way and set the elegant Sarah to watch and doze while nature took its course. His one expressed notion as we walked to the dwelling house was that he might yet "get a little sleep."

But by this time curiosity had got the upper hand of me. Agard's "ethical background" was becoming far more complicated than I had supposed. I was to leave early in the morning. He and I talked and tramped around in my room for some time, at the point of saying good-night, and at last sat down on opposite sides of the bed.

"Well, you see," he admitted in a manner of desperation, "things sort-of *drove* me to it—*everything*, seems like. You know, it can get powerful quiet here in the brush. Sometimes for an hour you might hear a pin drop. An' I'd set an' think—just as free as if I was ridin' up yonder on one o' them hot-weather clouds. It's hard to explain. . . ."

"Those mental processes can't be explained," I agreed, diagnosing a solitude-complex.

"No—you understand? Well, an' these niggers, now—you can't let 'em think they're as good as you are, or first thing you know they're *better* than you are, by George."

"Quite right," I observed; "in some localities I could mention they won't give a white woman a seat in a street-car."

"Certainly they won't," he went on. "But, in his place,

I've got no grudge against a nigger—on his side of the counter and in his end of the house. When they used to come to me with the asthma or water-brash, I would always ask 'em about their symptoms an' their kids an' their crops whilst I was takin' their money. Fact is"—he bowed his cheeks to his fists in thought—"I kind o' *like* a decent nigger. It was bred in me, I reckon."

There are limits set in the South to a "liking" for Negroes —somewhat dangerous and very proper limits. This man recognized them; evidently acted within them. His case was very strange.

"Why let that bother you?" I humoured him. "I like 'em myself—any man does that really knows 'em."

"Any man that had the dry-nurse *I* did," he mused, "a stout, half-grown Kafir-blooded nigger boy! Well, about the drug business, I don't know hardly how it started, but it seemed to be the talk amongst the darkies that I would give 'em a *square deal*—that I would go to some pains to mix 'em the right medicine, and all that."

"You mean, they took you for their *only* friend?" I countered this assumption of virtue.

"Well," he confessed, "I don't know just what to say when you put it that-a-way. There are some as fine old families in these parts as you will ever meet, but there have been a lot o' mighty wild boys that grew up over Dalby way. God knows I believe in chivalry, an' the supremacy of the white race, Stranger, but——" He turned and faced me, suddenly on his guard.

"But you don't believe in leaving the proof of it entirely to the hoodlum element," I conceded. "Any thoughtful white man will agree with you there, so go ahead."

He went ahead somewhat more directly: "Well, I *will* say that things have occurred in this very county that can never be justified under any law of God or gentlemen, and our citizens just let it drift along, drift along. That's what's the matter with our nigger population to-day. Sullen? Disrespectful? Yes, even the good ones feel like they've got no show, no matter how well they behave. Doctor, we're losing our grip on 'em *morally*. It's a big, tangled-up question, I'll tell you. . . . Of course, I went along treatin' 'em about the same as usual, you understand, but more and more they

got to lookin' to me as—well, you might say, a friend. I had to read medicine, I *had* to do the best for 'em I could."

I rather disliked his drift. "But," I broke in, "do you mean to say that the doctors——"

He caught the implication instantly. "Oh, far be it from me," he hurried, "to say anything against the regular medical profession. It's the highest calling on God's earth. I'm just a quack, but I'd give ten years of my life for a proper training. I don't say for a minute that these doctors around here wouldn't treat a black case as straight as they would a white one. But I *do* know that the niggers have got so they are doubtful and suspicious of everything a white man does—think that the only interest he has in 'em is what little money he can get out of 'em."

"Not *my* kind of white man," I objected.

"Nor mine, either. Well, they got to comin' my way—afoot, a-horseback, an' on stretchers—mostly at night. You wouldn't believe it; fifty miles around." A groan escaped him. "The sights I have seen, the tales I have heard! My friend, I *had* to build those measly sheds out there."

"You will have your Reward."

"I hope to obtain Mercy. Anyhow, this nigger business has nearly got the best of me—strength, property, self-respect, and all. I feel like an outcast—not a soul left to stand by and help me but—a black wench."

I rose to the challenge. "Give me your hand, Doctor Agard," I said. "You are my kind of man—my *father's* kind. Your allies are the right-thinking classes here and everywhere, and they will stand up for you, too, whenever they understand about you. As long as I am in this county, people are going to hear you well spoken of; and if I lived here, I would go *partners* with you, provided you would take me on. Just write me down as one *friend*."

His hard eyes melted as he silently returned my grasp, there across the counterpane.

A sound of decrepit wheels in sand.

"Doctor! Oh, Doctor!" The call came stifled out of the dark—searching, vehement—a monstrous whisper.

Agard and I rose and looked at each other.

"That means——"

"Trouble," I nodded.

"Nigger trouble." He seized my lamp and hopped out into the road. I followed. The same crazy buckboard that I had seen that afternoon was in front of the house, the same ancient driver, apparently the same roll of bagging.

"Why, it's Uncle Gabe—Gabe Peak," was Agard's puzzled remark. "What's the matter, Gabe?"

"Doctor, my boy got shot."

"*John* shot? My God Al*mighty!*" The doctor spoke as though patience with Negro vagaries had limits. "I heard a gun, but never thought about John."

We looked over the back wheel. Unmistakably it was John, or what remained of him. A glance revealed an extravasated chest wound. He was in a daze, and, with thick gore bubbling from his lips, I thought he mumbled some reassurance to me about my buggy.

"Drive around to the side gate," said Agard.

The flimsy establishment got into action quickly. A stout stretcher was brought, and John was immediately conveyed into the rear shed and laid on a table of planks. There was rapid raking through an old sawmill surgeon's kit, opening of a can of chloroform from the store, fetching of gauze and absorbent cotton.

Gabe was terrorized and talkative. At a certain point of his babble Agard closed up his kit and spoke: "Sarah, telephone for Braden the first thing you do. . . . Doctor," he asked, quietly, "can you bear a hand with this case?"

I am a physician, and I answered as such.

"Well," he announced, "we'd better be on the move now. Gabe, you shut up, and take all you can carry—here, take this bag. Wait, Sarah—standin' there with those damned earrings on you!—you help get this man back on the stretcher. . . . Now—I left here at six o'clock on the Dalby road, but you don't know where I was bound for, *do* you?—until the deputy sheriff gets here."

"Doctor, I don't even know whichaway you went, so help me Gawd!" Sarah added the artistic touch.

"All right; you telephone, and then stay here with your patients. Don't try to bar any doors. Where's that Steve?"

The individual in question, sleek and hearty save for the

amputation of a hand, stepped in promptly from behind the door.

"Havin' a fine time around here, ain't you?" Agard greeted him. "Now you take that buckboard and get it away from here as fast as you can, toward Dalby. Get it clear off of the road as soon as you can, and don't worry about coming back right away. Understand?"

Steve apparently caught the meaning. Agard turned to me: "Doctor, shall we be going?"

He took the front of the stretcher, and I the rear. Followed closely by old Gabe, we stumbled along through the dark over pathless ground.

I was reasonably certain that a dead white man and a half-dead Negro were involved in this scrape. Gabe would not even admit that John had stolen the corn. But it stands to reason that he had. He had a mule.

Evidently an altercation had occurred down at the Peak cabin. The white farmer's shotgun and John's five-inch dirk had come into play in some sequence—simultaneously, perhaps, and not in order of the nightmare that Gabe related.

Gabe did not believe that the incident was closed. He was in extremities of fright.

I wanted to hurry but could not see my steps. I heard the buckboard rattling away. We entered the live-oak marsh; three times I was splashing blindly through the "branch." We forced our way through tall bear-grass, willows, and sassafras sprouts. The load of the burly Negro was like iron fetters.

At last a black obstruction loomed before us. This turned out to be another of the doctor's shanties—the "spring-house," he called it. He braced himself and threw back a rusty lock; we passed in and laid our stertorous burden on a dank wooden floor. He then transferred Gabe's load to the inside.

"Now, you clear out of here," he ordered the old darky. "Go up the branch; go *away* up. Keep goin' till you get to Millard's pasture. Then look out for yourself."

Gabe had done the best he knew for his wayward son. He now embraced the occasion to eliminate himself.

Agard struck a match and coaxed an oil wick into flame.

He took off his everlasting cuffs and used my handkerchief to polish the lamp-chimney. I looked about me.

This never had been a "spring-house." There was a broad, rough shelf along one wall, where the surgeon's kit now lay. In the middle of the floor stood a table of pine boards and trestles. There was a window, at the end of the room, closed with a sliding shutter instead of a sash. Below this stood a camp cot. Narrow strips of mosquito screening were tacked here and there over obvious cracks. The lamp hung on a low wooden bracket at one corner of the table.

John was barely conscious. We carefully laid him on the boards and ripped away the rags of his calico shirt.

"Will you operate, Doctor?" Agard ceremoniously invited me.

Operate!—There in the dark.

"No, Doctor, the patient is yours," I replied with due formality. "I shall, of course, be pleased to assist you as required."

I saturated a wad of gauze with chloroform and applied it. The instruments, such as they were, were laid out in order, and I stood by. An intravenous injection was prepared in case of need—a large veterinary syringe which Agard filled accurately before starting to work.

The traumatism of the case may be passed over. It was inordinately gross; the pericardium itself was exposed and doubly punctured.

Agard, however, was not fazed for an instant. He methodically sutured the still oozing pectoral veins, cleared away bone fragments and pulmonary tissue, and went ahead extracting BB shot as daintily as if he expected a pink-tea convalescence. I merely changed sponges—sponges—as fast as I could roll them, and I made an absorbent dressing as big as a hat. The heat, odour, and gas soon became very bad, since the doctor objected to the door being opened—on account of the army of insects, if nothing else.

What was the use of it all? I speculated. Mere make-believe; the slayer's life was triply forfeit. Yet Agard worked on, ant-like, always searching out the obstruction. He was grotesquely impeded: he had no tools, no light, no technique —nothing but intuition; but he exposed the left lateral aspect

of the heart and went about reproducing Laurent's operation like the born surgeon he was.

The hunt was up. First we heard a shot; then two; then a tremendous hullaballoo from up above, knocking about, cur dogs barking, and the shrieking of Negroes.

I looked at Agard and dropped a probe. He never paused.

"I can't be in two places at once," he said. "Glad I can't just now." He faced me. "Would *you* like to beat up to Millard's pasture, Doctor? I can easily turn down the lamp for you."

"I'll do with this for a while yet," I answered. The sweat began to trickle off the point of my chin in a little stream. Agard seemed dry and cool—a man sapped of all moisture.

The racket at the quarters in time wore away to silence; Sarah had evidently kept her trust. I peeped out to see if the premises were on fire.

"I'd keep that door *shut*, if I were you," Agard harshly whispered.

But it must have been a hunting instinct, and not my indiscretion, that was responsible for what followed. The cry was full on us almost before we knew it had started. All the jungle that had seemed to me so vast was covered in one rush. We had just shot home the prepared injection when the door burst open before a booted heel.

"Ah! I knew damned well we'd find 'em together!" the leader exulted.

In the lamp's yellow light he stood instantaneously revealed to my eye, for what he was—a young nobleman. Though frightened out of my wits, I loved him unawares. I claimed him as of my own people. He was a six-footer, about thirty, trim-belted. He covered us steadily with a blue steel automatic. His face was fresh and full; his very teeth were handsome; his voice, though keen with revilings, had a quality that no mongrel ever yet registered.

He was a young lion lashing himself into a proper frenzy.

Behind him trampled a small but adequate mob. I saw a rope, pistols, faces—some stern and resolute, others relaxing already into enjoyment.

"Jim Agard will doctor up the black dog!" shouted the leader. "But never mind, Doc, *we'll* treat his ailment now,

you misbegotten nigger-hugger!" The supporting party cursed emphatic approval.

"Are you sure there's enough of you to take him away from me?" Agard asked, pitifully sarcastic.

"Don't you get smart!" was the unanswerable threat. "I could take him away from *you* with one hand, you little old fool!"

"Yes, I know you could, Lieutenant, if you wanted to paw around with raw meat. This nigger has been shot to death in the first place—let him alone. I've called for the deputy sheriff; can't you let the Law have a whack at him, either?"

"To hell with the lawyers! Agard, do you know what that black fiend's done?" the younger man almost wept. "He cut Rafe Bascom's heart out—*Rafe Bascom!*—the straightest white man God ever made . . . left his poor wife a widow and his girl an orphan—the black, dirty hound! But *you* don't care for that—*you* don't even care who your own mother was. All *you* want to do is to harbour dirty niggers and consort with your little painted nigger wench! Bring that rope, men. I'm goin' to shoot this misbegotten white dog now, and *break up* some of this dirty business around here."

The wretch, Agard, surely thought his last moment had arrived. His voice was a mere husk. "Go ahead and shoot." He grimaced. He turned his limp hands to them, palm outward, his arms blood-stained to the elbow. "If my life has brought me no better esteem than that—if you believe I misconduct myself with the only woman I can hire for a nurse—if I am a *dog* for practising medicine—why, *go ahead and shoot!* B-But you might have a little mercy, Baldwin."

The deadly finger seemed to hesitate on the trigger for an instant. Tense silence had fallen, broken now by the criminal's groans and quiverings on the table.

"Watch that nigger—he's tryin' to get up!" an excited voice called.

My tongue, which had dried and cleaved to the roof of my mouth, loosed itself at Agard's last utterance of the name, Baldwin.

"Don't kill that man, *Clifford!*" I shouted, hysterically. "In God's name, don't disgrace your family by shooting down defenceless invalids!"

All eyes centred on me. Clifford's face, the reckless face of my own cousin, unseen and almost forgotten in fifteen years, stared at me blankly for a second.

"George!" he burst out. "Of all people! What in hell are *you* doin' here with this low-down nigger-kisser? Of course I wasn't goin' to shoot him—just scare him a little. But you've got no business here takin' up for him!"

"I've got a doctor's right to treat a case," I said, my whole body shaking, "and you and your crowd have got no right to dog this poor fellow like hell-hounds till he's afraid to call his soul his own. How could a Baldwin ever do that?"

"Because he takes up with niggers and has nothing to do with decent white people."

"Because you've driven him to it," I protested. "He's told me all about it. And he's clean as a hound's tooth, too. Clifford, I swear to you, this man's doing your dirty work, all by himself, doing the best he knows to smooth out this nigger trouble like a good white man—because he's got a heart and got nerve. And none of you ever reach him a helping hand."

Agard was hanging on my words like a culprit on his attorney's.

"Then what's he doing hiding out this Negro murderer?" demanded my cousin, his voice rising to renewed wrath.

I told him that Agard had no intention of letting any murderer get away; that he only wanted to save his own neck if he could; that the Negro had no chance, in any event. "Look over there, gentlemen, if you want to see a man die," I addressed the others.

It was a gruesome, almost unreal spectacle, not to be dwelt upon. It had a revealing effect upon the beholders. There was a mixture, a beginning reversal, of emotion—a new kind of interest in the concerns and doings of the quack doctor. John did not expire quietly. He was a magnificent brute, of untold powers of resistance. But he never could have survived; of that I am certain.

"My God!" Agard suddenly exclaimed, and toppled over.

A weakness came over me also; but I did not find it necessary to divulge the unprofessional ruse involved in the manner of John's taking off. I am accountable to no man for knowl-

edge of the kind and quantity of solution that Agard had put into the syringe for the worst emergency.

"Well, men, let's adjourn and go home," said Clifford several minutes later. "It looks like this raid was a mistake, and I apologize all round. Doctor Agard, here's sixty-eight dollars and some change. I don't think the boys will bother you much in your work after this. Here's my hand on it—never mind the blood."

More affirmations were received, hands shaken, and the crowd at last was gone—all but my cousin. We three tarried a short while in the shanty and then walked up the rise together.

Agard and I went into the "hospital." It was less of a wreck than I had anticipated, though there was some breakage. Sarah was still there, cowed, with the two other women and her green glass pendants. She announced her intention of leaving at once, but I helped to dissuade her with reassurances and a present of money.

"Well, you see what's happened to *this* night's rest," Agard tried to joke gaily as he set to work again, this time with the woman in the throes of childbirth. His ordeal had made him look sallower, older, more utterly insignificant. There was still a mystery about the man. He was expiating some doom that I had not penetrated.

It was a sombre reunion for my cousin and me, but the late night air was refreshing as we walked down the fork between the pines, through cool sand and dewy tufts of bitterweed.

"Cliff," I asked at last, "how did you fellows ever get so *down* on Agard?"

"Oh, his immorality, I reckon," my kinsman replied, moodily.

"Humbug. I tell you, he's not immoral."

"Well—oh, you know—the nigger business just attracted attention."

"He let his zeal outrun his discretion?" I suggested.

"Yes," Clifford declared, testily, "just like every fool Yankee will, with niggers."

"Yankee?" I gasped. "Why, I took him for one of our own people, born and bred."

"Well, yes, he *was* born and raised right there at the forks.

It seems a little funny. His mother came of one of the very finest families around here—the Millards. But his *father* was straight-out Yankee. The old man came down here from Illinois after the Civil War—Springfield, Illinois, I think they say."

"Oh, indeed?" I murmured. "Good God, *you don't say so!*"

So, the mystery about Agard evaporated. At last I had located his Ethical Background. It was not my background, in any vital sense—I should have had wit enough to know that. His was rather palpably connected with the lowly Abraham Lincoln's. Background. . . . Of course, we are all free to choose our lives to a certain extent; but, on the other hand, there always remains the question of why we choose it.

THE TIE THAT BINDS

By GEORGE PATTULLO

From *Saturday Evening Post*

HARDTACK and Wally lolled on the deck of a cargo boat in the crowded harbour of Piræus, wondering what they would do with the night. The sun was setting, and hills and city lay bathed in a mellow golden glow. Behind them some Moslem deck passengers were at their devotions—bearded patriarchs, making obeisance on their prayer mats before bedding down on the hatch. "Time and money, and no place to spend it," grumbled Hardtack. "I knowed all the while this trip would be a bust."

Wally turned on him angrily.

"You wanted to sight-see, didn't you? Well, whose idea was this, anyhow—yours or mine?"

"Any time there's a idea, it's like to be mine," Hardtack admitted; "but I never meant to do nothin' else except ruins—I like a li'l' action now and ag'in. We ain't even caught up to Noah's ark yet, have we?"

"That's right! Go on and beef!"

"I ain't beefin'. Only let's do something."

"Then let's go ashore."

"What for? There's nothin' to do."

"I promised my sister I'd go see the Acropolis," said Wally, stubbornly.

Hardtack let out a yowl.

"More ruins, I bet!"

"These," retorted Wally, "are the wonders of the world. The pinnacle of art was reached by them, my sister says. My sister says the Parthenon by moonlight is majestic."

"What does she know about it? I never even knowed you had a sister!"

"Well, I have. And she's had good schooling, too."

"Huh! Where is it at, this here—what did you say it was?"

"You seen it just before we come into the harbour. Sure you did—the big white thing 'way up on top of that high hill."

"Shucks, that's five miles from here!"

"Sure. It's at Athens, you poor roughneck. Ain't you never read nothin'?"

"How'll we git there?"

"Oh, there's bound to be some way. Come on, shake a leg."

"All right," Hardtack assented, "I'll go. But I hope you'll remember your weakness, Wally."

"There you go again! That's just like you!"

"Well, I only wanted to warn you for your own good."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

Hardtack evaded the question.

"You ain't forgot the ruckus we got into in Constantinople?" he reminded him.

"Whose fault was that? Mine, I suppose!"

"The police seemed to think so. Anyhow, every time a woman looks sideways at you, it ain't safe to figure you've got the all-clear signal, buddy—remember that."

"You make me tired."

"Well, I've done my duty, so let's go."

The formality of obtaining a landing permit delayed them two hours, because the steamer had arrived late in the afternoon and the control and quarantine officers showed no hurry about inspection, so it was after eight o'clock before the pair were ready to start.

"No use goin' now," Hardtack complained.

"Why ain't there? The moon'll be just right by the time we get there. She's near full to-night, too."

"I wish I was."

They haggled with a boatman and were presently put ashore at the landing stage. There they encountered a belated runner for a travel agency frantically searching for some lost trunks, and he directed them to the electric railway. They boarded a first-class car. In a few minutes the train stopped at Phalerum and three gobs got on.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Hardtack, grinning from ear to ear. "Look who's here!"

They grinned back at him.

"Where're you guys headin'?" he inquired.

"The Acropolis."

"So're we," said Hardtack, pleased to discover he wasn't on a fool's errand and that others knew about the place. Then and there they joined forces. The gobs told them that the destroyer to which they belonged was anchored in the harbour of Phalerum and a large liberty party was ashore.

"How about a li'l' drink before we go see that place?" Hardtack suggested. "It'll look better."

They agreed that the point was well taken. Accordingly, on arrival at the station, the five of them piled into a horse cab and set out for what the gobs called Shanghai, that they might hoist a couple of ouzos before tackling the serious business of the evening. None of them spoke Greek and the cabby did not know a word of English, yet he started off without hesitation, cracking his whip.

"How does he know where we want to go?" Wally wanted to know.

"He don't," answered a gob; "but he keeps on goin' till we tell him to stop. It works fine."

Shanghai is a cabaret district of Athens much frequented by sailors. Just as they entered it a terrific clamour broke out directly ahead and the street echoed to the tumult of combat. Men came running from all directions. In ten seconds the crowd grew so dense that their cab could not move.

They sat there and listened to fierce yells, the thudding of chairs and overturned tables, crash of glass and splintering wood.

"Say, what's comin' off?" they demanded of the citizens near them.

"I think," said one who understood, "somebody is angry."

"You're sure it ain't a weddin'?" rejoined Hardtack.

The native made some inquiries and shrugged his shoulders.

"The Americans and the English, they dispute," he announced.

Next instant the cab was empty—empty, with the driver howling for the police and calling heaven to witness what had

been done to him. Here on earth his plaints went unheeded, for the crowd was split wide apart as though a battering ram had struck it. With Hardtack in the lead, they burst through the press and arrived, pell-mell and panting, at the scene of strife.

In a cabaret below the level of the sidewalk a party of American gobs was debating who won the war with a party of English bluejackets. Hardtack gave tongue to a battle whoop and the five plunged into the fray. The maelstrom ingulfed them.

Now they've been singing the heroes of antiquity long enough in Greece. A petty skirmish like Marathon, where one hundred and ninety-two Athenians fell, goes echoing down the corridors of time. Xenophon mentions, as important, a battle at Corinth where eight of the contestants were slain!

We do better than that nowadays in a riot. And there was Phayllus' celebrated jump of forty-nine feet! So I submit that the poets did most of the valorous deeds for those old birds, and from the standpoint of fights they were tame affairs. Legend and literary skill have exalted them.

But this was the real thing. No talky-talk here, with each side shoving forth champions to brag and boast and crack their heels together in the hope of scaring the enemy. No, sir, just an honest, sincere knock-down-and-drag-out. Seldom in its history has Athens staged a sweeter fight.

Not that much could be seen. The lights danced and flickered and the dust welled up in choking clouds, obliterating individuals, so that some of the combatants struck out blindly at any one within reach. But Hardtack selected an antagonist and closed and stayed with him. He was a hairy-chested guy with a Gibraltarized skull, and the two livened up the party considerably.

Shouts of encouragement and bellowings of rage; the scraping of feet striving desperately for a hold; thud and grunt of impact. From time to time the surge of the struggling mass propelled a group up the steps and into the street. They promptly fought their way back again. It seemed to be a point of honour not to leave the floor.

Twice Hardtack and his opponent found themselves in the cool night air, where there was plenty of room for their

business. Twice they manfully dived into the mêlée again, although the first time Hardtack had to let go of an advantageous hold on his man's throat. On the second occasion, the bluejacket courteously removed his fingers from Hardtack's hair.

The clangour of the battle reverberated over the city. Spectators in the street were bawling for the town guard; women shrieked; a fire-engine siren in the neighbourhood added to the deafening tumult; the debate below stairs never flagged. Now the affirmatives had the edge, then the negatives won the upper hand. Gradually the uproar subsided to grimmer sounds—short, savage snarls, a moan or two, the gasp of men at the last ounce of effort.

And then the asty-phylax—the town guard—the police—they arrived. They came at a run, scattering the proletariat. At the entrance they stopped. They listened. They hesitated. Then they held a conference. The citizens urged them to get busy. Forming in phalanx, they advanced resolutely to the steps; by sheer weight of numbers they would overwhelm the rioters.

Their cautious approach quickened to a rush. Down they went into the cabaret. The mob raised frenzied cheers. But it was a bit crowded inside, and Epaminondas Papadopoulos came out. He came out without touching the steps, and probably lighted the fires of another revolution by landing in the middle of a couple of spectators from Crete.

Then Phocion Polymenakos, the Spartan, rocketed into view. A bluejacket had hit Phocion a swat that came near to landing him in Plutarch's Lives. One by one they emerged hurriedly, as though they were not wanted down there. Within two minutes the entire body of asty-phylax was out in the street and ready for another conference.

"Here come the soldiers!" rose the cry.

Sure enough, the stirring notes of a bugle soared clear and high above the hubbub. Followed the tread of marching feet—clump, clump, clumpety-clump. The crowd took one earful and tarried not. They have had experience of the military in street troubles in Athens, and they broke and scattered.

Perhaps the sudden hush outside carried foreboding to the warriors locked in straining embrace. Or it may be that

there is a telepathy of danger. At any rate, the fight in the cabaret paused for breath and to listen. Then the combatants broke apart as though by general consent and made a dash for the steps. A few earnest souls continued to punch and gouge as they were swept upward by the rush, but these were mere flotsam on the main stream and did not stay it. Neither did the asty-phylax, who tried to interpose. They were brushed aside, and off ran the disputants, carrying their casualties with them. When the soldiers arrived in Shanghai, everything was as quiet there as in Chinatown after a tong battle.

Hardtack and Wally brought up the rear guard of the American contingent, dragging along one of their gob acquaintances. He seemed a trifle confused as to his whereabouts and kept murmuring "Mamma! Oh, mamma!" A kick in the mid section had probably contributed to unsettle him.

"Here! In here!" Hardtack panted as they arrived opposite a coffee shop with their burden sagging between them.

"They'll catch us," objected Wally.

"I can't run no farther."

There was nobody in the coffee shop except the proprietor, who seemed undecided whether to run or yell for help when they staggered in. From his front door he had heard the row in the cabaret and knew that the soldiers had been called to quell it; also, his eyes told him that here were three of the most active participants.

"Shut the door," Hardtack commanded through puffed lips, and the landlord mechanically obeyed. "Now help me with this boy."

They laid the gob out on the floor in rear of the shop and went to work pumping his arms up and down. Then Hardtack turned him over and administered first aid to the drowning. In spite of these remedies the gob soon became normal and made an abrupt and strong effort to get on his feet again with a view to resuming the debate. The first warning they had of returning strength was when he suddenly let fly a right which caught the landlord squarely on the nose.

"Take it easy, buddy," Wally cautioned. "It's all over and the bunch've legged it."

"I wanna fight," remarked the gob as he held shakily to the back of a chair.

"Sure! It does you credit, too, ol' settler. But sit down now and have one. You'll get lots of chances later on."

They ordered three ouzos. The weeping landlord brought them more from fear than because he wanted their business. He was tempted to rush to the door and summon the police; the only thing that deterred him was a conviction the three would beat him up before the asty-phylax could reach the spot. He sniffled while serving the drinks, but when he discerned the size of the tip that Hardtack left on the table his lamentations ceased and he began to display an interest in the proceedings.

"Here come them soldiers now," exclaimed Wally, but the running feet he heard turned out to belong to five members of the American debating team.

"We got into a blind alley and had to beat it back," they said.

"Just in time," responded Hardtack, cordially. "Garçon, apportez another bunch of ouzos. And pronto, bitte! Get me?"

They sat down with groans of thankfulness, some of them on the verge of collapse. Not a man there but showed the marks of battle. Three of them were fearful sights; Hardtack looked as though he might have cheered for Judge Gary at an I. W. W. meeting.

"I suppose they'll grab us," said a gob. "But meanwhile, here goes!" And he tossed off the milky aromatic liquid at a gulp.

The soldiers did not pursue, however. The Greeks have learned that they'll always get the worst of any international complications with the great powers, so the officer in command discreetly sent word to the respective naval commanders to dispatch patrols ashore, for God's sake.

Silence reigned in the coffee shop whilst the gobs got back their breath and nursed their wounds. After a while one of them inquired, "Say, what're you guys doing here, anyhow?"

"We was on our way to see the Metrolopus," answered Hardtack.

A moan burst from an A. B. who was sitting forward on a stool, his head between his hands. He glanced up wearily

to say, "So was I. This is the third night I've started out to get a look at the Parthenon by moonlight and I ain't made it yet."

"A lot of the boys have, though, Red."

"What good does that do me?" demanded Red.

"My sister says——" began Wally.

"Sure! It's majestic," Hardtack cut in. "Well, it ain't too late to go now."

But they had no heart for sight-seeing. Only the gob who had been kicked in the mid-section took any notice of Hardtack's proposal—he seemed peculiarly tenacious of ideas.

"I'm on," he announced. "I started out to see the Parthenon, and I'm a-going to see the Parthenon."

One of the others suggested: "Well, there's no hurry. How about a beer?"

"I'll go you. But I tell you right now I'm a-going to see the Parthenon."

"Nobody's trying to stop you that I know of."

"They'd better not," said the gob.

Over a round of beers they fell to discussing the events of the evening. All were agreed that nothing but the timely intervention of the soldiery had saved their opponents. Also, they were unanimously convinced that the Old Man would raise Cain, and no mistake.

"Say," remarked a gob, struck with a sudden thought, "how did you two birds get into it, anyhow? Who asked you to the party?"

"You did."

"How come?"

"We heard you yellin' for help," replied Hardtack.

The A. B. transfixed him with a steely stare and retorted in a rasping voice: "Any time you catch me yellin' for help—— Say, for two obols I'd——"

"Aw, cut it out!" somebody protested. "Do you want to start something? Seems to me like we've had enough fightin' for a while."

Said Red, "Ain't it the truth? I've been in more trouble since the Armistice than I was during the whole war."

There was a chorus of assent.

"The limeys and us to-night."

"And us and the limeys at Constantinople."

"And the limeys and the frogs at Haifa."

"And the frogs and the wops at Smyrna."

"Don't forget the limeys and the wops at Leghorn, neither. They piled the stiffs up on the pier."

For a quarter of an hour they reviewed the clashes between sailors of the Allied nations in various ports since the Armistice.

"The war to end war," said somebody in a pause. Catcalls and hoots of derision.

"I've been bummin' round the wurruld, man and bhoy, for twenty-foive years and I never seen the loike of the hate."

"What? You ain't felt the spiritual uplift? Why, I'm ashamed of you, Paddy! You're just awful coarse."

Then Wally broke into a song the dough-boys composed on the Rhine:

"When the next war comes around,
In the front ranks I'll be found.
I'll rush in again pell-mell.
Yes, I will—like hell, like hell!"

They roared the chorus, oblivious of prowling patrols.

"Well, let's get back to the ship," Red proposed. "Might as well take our medicine now as later."

"I'm a-going to see the Parthenon," said the gob with Hardtack.

"All right, we'll all go. Maybe if we can show tickets to the Acropolis the Old Man'll take our word for it that we wasn't mixed up in the row."

"What? With a face like that?" exclaimed Red. "Fat chance!"

The other mournfully admitted that the Old Man was not likely to fall for such a story, but they decided to go along with Hardtack and Wally anyway.

It was growing late when they left the coffee shop and they wandered a considerable distance hunting for cabs. Once they thought they glimpsed a patrol and ran up a dark alley. As they emerged from it into the street again a swelling murmur arrested them.

"What's that?"

The murmur grew to a babel of sounds. It was drawing nearer.

"Another fight! Let's beat it!"

"No, wait a minute. Maybe it's some of the gang."

A mob of men swirled around a corner. Now they moved at a rush, now they stood still. The mass seemed to revolve around its centre; figures darted in and out; the mass heaved and sank and heaved again. Oaths and savage yells. They came to a momentary halt under an electric light and the gobs obtained a clear view of them.

"The limeys! They're at it again!"

"Those aren't our guys!"

"That other bunch has ganged up on 'em! Look! Look at that, will you?"

Above a struggling group a knife had flashed. They did not wait for more. Letting out a yell, they went tearing into the combat.

"Watch out for the knives!" somebody cautioned.

"And when you—git your man down"—this from Hardtack—"be sure he don't git—up agin. Take that!"

Overwhelmed by numbers, the bluejackets were fighting desperately. Three of their number were laid out in the street. They heard the smash of the new attack and turned wearily to meet it. But instead of a fresh rush of the enemy, a hoarse bellow reached them—"All right, you guys! Give 'em hell!"

"The Yanks!"

They swung around and waded into the fight again, and within five minutes the street was cleared. As a mopping-up job it was a creditable performance. A bluejacket kicked the last knife wielder down a flight of steps and summed up the affair with "That's that!"

"Come on!" yelled Hardtack. "Let's beat it while the going's good!"

They picked up their wounded and scattered in all directions. Hardtack and Wally found themselves running down a street alongside some gobs and half a dozen of the English. They did not slacken pace until well away from the scenes of disturbance.

Then a bluejacket panted, "I sy, wot's the 'urry?"

There was sense to this, since they had arrived in a portion of the city where patrols would not be likely to search for them. They slowed to a walk.

"'Ow about some beer?"

Not a dissenting voice—practical thinking like this has built up the British Empire. They looked around them for a coffee shop.

"We'll have to get a move on or it'll be closing time," remarked a gob.

At last they found one at a curve in the street.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Hardtack, jovially, as they drew several tables together and sat down.

"Wot ho, matey!" It was the hairy gent who had engaged his attention earlier in the evening. They grinned at each other.

"You can beat me runnin'," said Hardtack.

"Yus, and I can beat your blinkin' 'ead orf at anythink," retorted the bluejacket, giving him a lusty slap on the back, and proceedings started in all good fellowship.

There was no beer to be had, but the landlord produced a fair quality of cognac. They stayed there for nearly an hour, long past closing time. In vain the harassed proprietor besought them to leave. They pretended not to understand.

As the minutes passed, the *entente cordiale* became a love feast. They pledged one another; they solemnly vowed eternal friendship. There were songs, all of them sentimental, with bluejackets and gobs roaring the chorus in close harmony.

And then—"Strike me dead, but you blokes just got there in the nick o' time," remarked the hairy-chested man as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"But we always do," replied Hardtack. "Ain't you noticed that, ol'-timer?"

"Wot d'you mean by that?"

"Well, we saved your hides, didn't we?"

"Wot of it?"

"Nothing."

"I know wot you mean! You tyke that back, do you 'ear? Tyke it back!"

"Take back nothin'! That goes as she lays!" Hardtack retorted.

The bluejacket pushed back his chair and very deliberately moved the table aside in order to make room for the ceremonies.

"We may as well finish it 'ere," he remarked with a sort of sad patience.

Next minute the two were at it, hammer and tongs. Several members of the party tried to separate them and restore peace. Whang! They got what the peacemaker usually gets and promptly joined the fracas. In no time at all they had resumed the debate at the point where they broke off in the cabaret.

The landlord fled at the first blow. He fled as fast as he could leg it to the nearest square, where he encountered an American patrol of six men under a gunnery officer, sent ashore to round up the liberty party. They hardly needed his guidance—the noise of the row was echoing from the hills.

"Cheese it!" shouted one of the combatants as the officer reached the door.

They went from there any way they could—out the back way, through windows, down cellar. Hardtack and Wally managed to gain the backyard, whence they streaked down an alley. But several of the gobs fell into the hands of the patrol.

"This is a fine business, isn't it?" roared the gunnery officer. "You men ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

No response.

"Fighting in a foreign port and giving the Navy a bad name!"

Still no reply.

"Well, I hope they gave you a damned good licking. You look like it."

The gobs did not utter a word.

"Did they? Don't stand there like a lot of dumb-bells! Who licked?"

Meanwhile Hardtack and Wally had hailed a cab and given orders that they should be conveyed to the station without pause. There they caught a train for Piræus and an hour later a boatman rowed them out to their steamer.

"Well," said Hardtack as they set foot on deck, "we sure were lucky to git out of that."

"But we never did get to see the Parthenon!"

"Shucks, what does that matter?"

"I promised my sister——"

"You can send her a picture post card, can't you?"

"I reckon so," Wally replied, but he kept muttering to himself all the way to their cabin.

"What the Sam Hill will I tell her?" he demanded.

"Well, I am surprised at you! Tell her the Metrolopus sure looks majestic by moonlight."

"Or I could copy a piece out of the guidebook, maybe," Wally suggested.

"Lots of 'em do it. Say, Wally, when you buy them post cards, git one for me, too."

"What for?"

"Well, I've been figurin' I might send one to Mamma. Mamma don't know where the Metrolopus is at, but it'll sort of comfort her to know I ain't wasting my time."

They started to undress.

"Well," remarked Hardtack with a sigh of satisfaction as he washed the blood from his face, "we had a nice time, anyhow, didn't we? And say, I'd liefer fight with them limeys than any guys I know."

"They sure do give you your money's worth," said Wally.

Both of them drew automatics from their hip pockets, slipped them under the pillows and went peacefully to sleep.

THE COURIER OF THE CZAR

By ELSIE SINGMASTER

From *Saturday Evening Post*

HEARING the clock strike twelve Betsey Shindledecker opened her eyes. She had not been asleep, she had merely been waiting for her sister Tilly who lay by her side to be asleep. At eleven o'clock Tilly had spoken, at half past she had turned from one side to the other; but now, for half an hour, she had been lying quietly.

Betsey lay blinking and looking round the room. The windows were dim rectangles outlining a sky which was only a little brighter than the black wall; the ancient bureau and washstand and dower chest showed only as indistinct masses. All other objects were lost: the two coloured prints on the wall, one of "Marianna," one of "Julianna," the mirror, the chairs, one draped with the plain Mennonite garb of Betsey, the other with the plain Mennonite garb of Tilly. The two white caps hanging on the tall posts at the foot of the bed were lost and so were the stripes in the carpet and the gay pattern of the coverlet. It would be impossible for any night to be darker, or for any wind to whistle more ominously than the wind whistled at this moment round the corners of the house.

Her mind relieved by Tilly's quiet breathing, Betsey explored with hand and foot. Her foot sought her woollen slipper, her hand the thick flannel gown which hung on the post near her head. Finding both, she stood in a moment slippered and robed. Still Tilly breathed quietly.

Moving slowly Betsey approached the door. When a board creaked beneath her great weight she stood still a long time; when Tilly sighed, she put out her hand to clutch the corner of the bureau and thus to support herself. She grew

no more comfortable in mind as she advanced, because the steps would creak far more loudly than the floor, and when she reached the bottom of the flight she would have to speak a reassuring word to the dog and the cat. This was not a new experience; for almost a month she had been stealing nightly from her sister's side.

Compared to the bedroom the kitchen was bright. The fire shone through the mica doors of the stove and was reflected from the lustre ware on the mantel and the brass knobs on the ancient cupboard. The black window-panes formed mirrors so that there seemed to be many fires. On one side of the room a quilt was stretched on a frame and on the taut surface lay scissors, spools of thread, a little pincushion, two pairs of spectacles, and two thimbles. The ground of the quilt was dark and spread over it were multitudes of white spots of various sizes.

Other reflecting surfaces were presented by the eyes of a Maltese cat and an Airedale dog, the one lying on a chair, the other beside the stove. Apparently unsurprised by this mysterious advent in the middle of the night, the cat purred and the dog parted his lips and teeth in a grin, and both having raised their heads laid them down. They paid no heed when Betsey, touching a spill to the coals, lit the hanging lamp which illuminated brilliantly the quilt and the sewing implements lying upon it. The background of the quilt was blue and the white spots were star-shaped. The Milky Way crossed the surface diagonally and along the edge and in the dark spaces were set Orion, the Pleiades, Ursa Major, and other familiar constellations. Between the stars the quilt was covered with tiny stitches set close together.

Sinking into one of the Windsor armchairs at the side of the frame, Betsey selected a needle from the pincushion. It was not one of the fine needles with which the delicate quilting had been done, but a larger one, and she used it not to sew, but to destroy sewing. Stitch by stitch she ripped the fine work, sighing as she did so. It was clear that that which she ripped was not as even as the section opposite the other chair.

The hands of the clock pointed to half-past twelve, and presently to one. Then Betsey exchanged the large needle for a smaller one and threading it began to replace the stitches

she had ripped out. Those she put in were as straight as a ruler and as much alike as rice grains.

At three o'clock she rose stiffly. Though her back ached, and though her eyes were heavy and her hands stiff she was happy; the catastrophe which she feared and against which she struggled was postponed a little longer. Then, suddenly, she was smitten by terror. She did not exactly hear Tilly move, but she knew that Tilly had moved, moreover, that she was awake. If Tilly spoke she believed she would die of shock. But when Tilly did speak she answered calmly.

"Betsey!" The voice was sharp with terror. "Sister!"

"Yes." Betsey walked toward the stairway.

"Where are you?"

"I'm coming." What should she say? It would be easy to invent an excuse, but Betsey did not like to lie. "I did not lock the door, Tilly."

"Why, no, of course not! I locked it, like always. Come back to bed!"

"I'm coming," answered Betsey.

Her voice was steady, but her heart jumped in her side. As she grasped the railing to ascend she was aware of her pulse throbbing in her wrist. She felt her way across the room and lay down, slippers, gown, and all. She was trembling, not only because she was frightened, but because she was cold.

"I had a queer dream," said Tilly, drowsily. "I dreamed I could not see any more to sew straight."

"Are you awake?" asked Betsey, sharply.

Tilly did not answer. Did she speak from a dream or from full consciousness?

Hearing the clock strike twelve, Betsey opened her eyes, It was harder to open them to-night than last night and last night it nad been harder than the night before. It was the twenty-eighth night she had wakened at twelve o'clock and had gone faltering down the stairs.

Beside her Tilly lay quietly, her breathing that of a child. The sky was black outside the rectangle of the window and there was again an uneasy whispering round the frame. The old furniture showed only vague outlines.

"I can't do this forever," said Betsey to herself. "I'm

getting thin, and I'm getting so tired I can't wake on time, and then what will happen?"

Her exploring foot sought her slipper, her exploring hand sought her bed-gown. Anxiety made her nervous; she held her breath to listen. But Tilly slept sweetly.

"If I'm no more so heavy the boards won't creak so under me," she thought as she felt her way across the room. "*Ach*, but I'm tired!" She repeated the word mentally with each step. "Tired, tired, tired."

In the kitchen there was the same glow of the fire, the same loveliness of light and shadow. The Maltese cat lay on his chair, the Airedale dog lay before the stove. Each lifted his head and each settled himself and closed his eyes. The starry quilt had advanced a little farther; a new section was set with two varieties of stitches, one short and regular, the other long and irregular.

Betsey found her large needle and sat down heavily. She ripped one stitch, then another. The point of the needle caught in the material and made little marks. She bent lower and lower—were her eyes also growing dim? She picked out another stitch and another, then her forehead touched the belt of Orion, her hand lay quietly upon Ursa Major.

After a long time she became conscious of some impending danger. Was she hurt and helpless? When she opened her eyes and saw Tilly standing by the quilting frame power was restored to her and she sprang up. Tilly stood tall and bent in her gray bed-gown. Saying nothing, she looked at the starry quilt, then at her sister, then at the starry quilt.

"What is it?" she asked at last. "What do you make alone here in the middle of the night?"

Betsey stood paralyzed.

"You're ripping out my sewing and doing it over. That's how it gets always all right by morning. Isn't it so, Betsey?"

Betsey did not answer.

"You think I can't see any more?" demanded Tilly.

Betsey said not a word.

"No, I can't see any more." Tilly answered her own question. "This long time already I have trouble. I can't see to sew. I can't see to read. Sometimes I can't see you. I've twice stepped on the cat and once on the dog. If I do not step on them all the time it's because they get nice

out of my way. They know me. I'll give up sewing. You'll have enough trouble with me yet, Betsey, without ripping out my crooked stitches. Now come to bed."

Betsey looked at the clock—the hands pointed to half-past four.

"It's not worth while to go to bed. I'll get dressed ready to milk and I'll watch for Herr when he comes to fetch the milk and I'll say he shall tell Doctor Landis to come to us. He'll cure you, Tilly. He'll surely cure you."

The clock ticked solemnly—it was now eight o'clock, now nine. Soft flakes of snow had begun to fall, the sky seemed to stoop lower and lower. Tilly sat at the end of the settle, her elbow on the arm, her hand supporting her bending face, a finger pressed upon each eye. Now and then a tear rolled down her cheek.

"It's not that I'm crying," she explained, angrily. "It's that my eyes water."

"Yes," said Betsey. Betsey was the only moving object except the pendulum of the clock. The dog and cat lay motionless but alert. Even the cupboard and the mantel and the starry quilt seemed to be alert and waiting.

"It's ten o'clock," said Betsey at last. "Why, then, does he not come?"

"He has perhaps a great many sick ones," suggested Tilly.

Betsey looked up the road and then down.

"You can't see far in the snow," she explained.

"Is it snowing?" asked Tilly.

Betsey turned from the window and looked at her sister.

"Do you ask because you want to keep your eyes covered? Or is it that you can't see?"

"I want to keep my eyes covered," declared Tilly. Tilly did want to keep her eyes covered, but it was because she believed that if she uncovered them she could not see. "I sewed perhaps a little too late last evening. If you want to sew, Sister," she said, heroically, "then sew."

"I don't need to sew," answered Betsey. "He's coming. He has his buggy, not his auto. I guess he's afraid the snow will get deep for him. He's driving his Minnie-horse, the yellow one. She's a good horse; they say when sometimes he's tired and falls asleep she takes him home. I would

rather have a good horse than an auto. He's stopping at the gate." Betsey's voice grew shrill, the dog and the cat lifted their heads, the furniture seemed to stir as though that for which they all waited was now imminent. "I don't believe he'll hurt you, Sister."

Doctor Landis tied his horse and came up the path, a stout, ruddy-faced man with a short bristling moustache. He walked heavily, carrying his medicine case in one hand and a book in the other. He was a worldly Lutheran and a great reader.

"He's carrying his book," said Betsey. "He forgets he has it, I guess. If he would read the Bible, how fine that would be!"

Tilly did not answer. The water which streamed from her eyes burned like fire.

Doctor Landis brought in with him a breath of cold air and the pleasant odour of drugs. The room seemed to brighten; Tilly's spirits rose and Betsey felt so relieved that she sank upon a chair. He laid his medicine case and book on the settle and pulled off his gloves. He was able to speak the fluent Pennsylvania English of his generation though he preferred the Pennsylvania German of his ancestors.

"Well!" he said. "Did I bring that wicked book along? I have no wife and no child and I'm not a smoker and I must have something to fill in the time in this healthy place. It's twenty years since I was in this house. Now what's the matter with the eyes, Tilly?"

"They burn me and ache me." Tilly still pressed her fingers against the lids. "I can't see any more."

"You mean you can't see me?"

"I can see you if I take my hand away. But I can't see to sew."

Doctor Landis bent above the quilt. He made an inquiring sign to Betsey, pointing first to the quilt then to Tilly. Betsey nodded and he completed the pantomime by shaking his fist at the starry sky.

"Let's see these eyes." He sat down by Tilly on the settle and she put out her hand on the other side. It touched the book which he had laid there and she clutched it and held it as though it were a rope flung to a sinking swimmer.

"Open your eyes," commanded the doctor.

As Tilly obeyed with agony, the hot flood became hotter. She could see the doctor's face, but nothing beyond it, not even Betsey standing at his elbow.

"It's worse to-day than yesterday," she said, as though that lightened the seriousness of the case.

"And worse yesterday than day before, I dare say," said the doctor. "Yet you kept on sewing?"

"We had the starry quilt to finish," explained Tilly. "I thought when the starry quilt was done I'd rest my eyes and then it would also be soon time to work in the garden."

The doctor lifted the lid of Tilly's right eye, then the lid of the left. Tilly could not suppress a groan, at sound of which Betsey trembled from head to foot. The doctor rose heavily.

"Have you any black muslin, Betsey?"

Betsey took a roll from the cupboard drawer. Standing by the table the doctor folded a thick bandage and laid white gauze upon it, then he turned to Tilly, a bottle and a medicine dropper in his hand.

"Watch me, Betsey. See? Like this, four drops in each eye, night and morning."

"Oh! Oh!" moaned Tilly.

"Keep your eyes tight shut. Now I'm going to bandage them with a black bandage. If for any reason you have to remove it, you're to do it in a dark room."

"Must my eyes be tied shut?" gasped Tilly.

"They must indeed." The doctor stood at the table spreading salve upon the white gauze. "Put fresh gauze on, Betsey, and fresh salve, night and morning."

"For how long?" faltered Tilly.

"A week from to-day I'll be back to look at them."

"A week!" cried Betsey. "Must she keep them covered for a week?"

Smitten dumb, Tilly said nothing; she merely lifted the doctor's book and opened it as if to read and thus prove that this was a bad dream.

"A week at least," announced the doctor. "Then we'll see how they are. Too much quilting, Tilly. How old are you?"

"Only sixty-five," answered Tilly. "And I have good

spectacles. I bought them from such a peddler twenty years ago."

"I'll bet you did," mocked the doctor.

He came across the room holding the bandage as a child might hold a cat's cradle and tied it tight round Tilly's eyes.

"Not a whole week!" wailed Tilly.

"A whole week," said the doctor, pulling on his gloves. "Betsey can surely amuse you for a week."

It was nine o'clock in the morning and the Shindledecker kitchen was in order for the day. The cow had been milked hours ago, the dog and cat had been fed, the human beings had eaten their breakfasts, the dishes had been washed, and a dozen doughnuts, four pans of rusk, three pies, and one cake had been baked. At the window sat Betsey, a mass of blue, star-dotted material on her lap. The starry quilt was out of the frame and she was putting in the hem. Outside the rain poured upon the sodden earth. From within the landscape looked inexpressibly dreary, but when the door was opened there came in the smell of spring.

Tilly did not sit at the window, nor was there sewing in her lap; she sat in the corner of the settle and her hands were empty. The black bandage remained across her eyes.

"First it was a week," she said, despairingly. "Then another week and another week, and now yet another week."

"I have a feeling that next time it will be different." Betsey spoke in the strained voice of one determined to be cheerful.

"I have no such feeling," answered Tilly. "I feel that he will come and come and come and that I will sit and sit and sit. If it was only something in the world to do!"

"I'll read to you," offered Betsey.

"I know the Bible from beginning to end," declared Tilly. "I've read it every day since I was little. I don't believe it's meant we shall get stale on it. And the hymn book, that I not only know, but I can say it and sing it from the beginning to the Doxology, both German and English. And the Martyr Book, that I know, too. I know all about how they were persecuted and driven out and sent to prison and beheaded. I know how one of the brethren was burned with

an iron. You can't catch me on the Martyr Book. And the almanac, that I know also."

"We could sing," suggested Betsey. Her voice had a heartbroken quality. Her heart was breaking.

"Sing!" mocked Tilly. "*Sing!* When I'm blind!"

The clock ticked on and on, the rain fell steadily, silently upon the earth, audibly upon the roof of the porch, noisily through the tin spouting. Another sort of rain fell quietly from Betsey's eyes upon the starry quilt. Tilly did not cry, the consequent physical agony was too keen.

"If I only could do something for you!" mourned Betsey in her heart.

"You can do something for me if you will," said Tilly, as though she could see into Betsey's heart.

"What can I do for you?" asked Betsey, eagerly.

"There's a book in this house," said Tilly. "The doctor left it the first time. I guess he forgot it. When he said I must have my eyes tied shut I looked quickly at it. I couldn't read the reading, but I saw the picture. It was a picture of an old woman kneeling and a sword was pointing at her and a man was standing with a whip over her. Her back was bare and her breast was bare. I must know what happened to that old woman. Will you not"—Tilly's wheedling voice besought, pleaded; she knew but too well how much she asked—"will you not read me that book, Betsey?"

"Where is the book?" asked Betsey, to gain time.

"Hidden in the upstairs," confessed Tilly. "I hid it. I was afraid he would ask for it. I hid it first in the churn, then I carried it in the upstairs."

"He did ask for it," said Betsey. "He said did I see such a book laying round. I told him no."

"I heard you," acknowledged Tilly. "It was before I took it to the upstairs. I was then sitting on it. Will you read me that book, Betsey?"

"I cannot," said Betsey, weeping. "Anything else I'll do for you. But that's the world's book."

"You'll not find out what became of that poor old woman with the sword pointing at her and the whip coming down on her?" Tilly's voice was hard.

"No," wept Betsey. "I can't. It's to resist temptations

such as this that we're given strength. We've done our duty all our lives, let's not now break our rules when we're old."

The rain fell soddenly, the tears of Betsey fell steadily, Tilly sat motionless and blind on the settle.

"The cat is getting all the time fatter," said Betsey, achieving a brief composure.

There was no reply.

"But the dog gets a little thinner now that he goes so often out rabbit-chasing."

There was no answer.

"Sister," said Betsey. "Won't you talk to me?"

"I have nothing to talk about," said Tilly. "Dogs, cats, rabbits, baking, rain—how sick I am of all these subjects! I'd like something new to talk about. I'd like to know what became of that poor old woman with the sword pointing at her and the whip held over her. I'd like to talk about her."

"It's a book of the world's people." Betsey buried her face in the starry quilt. "I cannot. I cannot!"

The sun rose at six o'clock and its earliest beam, shining in the face of Betsey, woke her from sleep and to the consciousness of a leaden heart. It was Sunday and all her life until a few weeks ago she had wakened cheerfully on Sunday. She enjoyed the rest from labour, she loved to go to meeting, she loved all the day's peace and opportunity for meditation. The meeting-house stood across the road and there had never been a rain so heavy or a snow so deep that attendance was impossible. A few times there had been no one else there but William Hershey and once even William had not been able to get through the drifts on the mountain road, but the sisters never missed.

Betsey waked now with no sense of peace or assurance. She repressed a groan, as, turning, she looked at the bandaged head on the pillow beside her. Six weeks had passed since the doctor's first visit, but Tilly's eyes were still useless. She slept quietly and her mouth below the black cloth was not unhappy. The blind are said to resign themselves more quickly than the deaf—perhaps Tilly had resigned herself. Or, her fate still hanging in the balance, she may have felt hope.

Betsey had not only her acute and tender anxiety about

her sister to trouble her, she had a sin to remember and a cruel penance to look forward to. She had committed an offence and this morning she meant to confess it in meeting.

"I can be a sinner," said she, weeping. "But a hypocrite I cannot be. I can't look them any more in the eye over there."

Slipping carefully from bed she went about her work. Tilly slept late and it was well that she did so; her cruel hours of conscious darkness were that much shorter. Betsey opened the kitchen shutters and let in the horizontal sunshine; then she shook down the fire and slipping into her working jacket took her milk pail on her arm. The morning was not cold; the day which had dawned was to be like a day of May dropped accidentally into March. Tulips and hyacinths were pushing up through the soil of the garden, buds were swelling, the woodland back of the house had begun to have a look of misty purple as the twigs and little branches changed colour. Spring had always meant a foretaste of heaven to Betsey—how strange it was to have an aching heart!

Tilly slept on and on. Betsey prepared the breakfast and still she had not come. She stole upstairs and looked at her and realized after a moment of panic that she was asleep and not dead. Pushing the breakfast to the back of the stove she sat down with her Bible. But she could not read —the book lay strangely in her hand, the words looked unnatural, there was no sense of comfort from touch or sight.

At nine o'clock, when Tilly had not waked, Betsey stole to the room once more and got her Sunday dress and returning to the kitchen, put it on. The devil tempted her to make an excuse of Tilly's blindness to stay at home, but she resisted him. He seemed to whisper in her ear; she saw his smile, his horns, his cloven hoofs.

"Don't go this morning," he said. "Go next Sunday. This morning the meeting will be large. William Hershey will be there with all his family—you don't wish those little children to hear you make confession. Elder Nunnemacher will be there and you have always stood well before him. Perhaps next Sunday he will have to go elsewhere. The Stauffer sisters will be there—think how astonished they will be! And the Lindakugels and the Erlenbaughs and Herrs

and the Schaffers—all will be amazed. Wait, Betsey, wait."

"No," said Betsey aloud to the empty room. "I'll not wait. I'll leave my poor sister to find her way down, but I'll not wait."

Walking to the foot of the stairs she called up to Tilly.

"It's time for me to go to meeting, Sister. Can you eat your breakfast alone, do you think? It's everything ready."

"Yes," answered Tilly. "Or perhaps I'll lay till you come back."

"Yes, well," said Betsey. "You can call the dog to you."

Betsey shuddered—she had told a lie, it was not quite time to go; only William Hershey had driven up to the meeting-house and he came early to make the fire. But she dared not wait.

On the porch she lingered and breathed in the sweet air. If she could only breathe enough, perhaps she could ease her heart. But contemplation of nature could not heal sin, that was certain as the sin itself. She went slowly down the path to the gate and across the road and into the meeting-house. William Hershey was putting coal into the stove, Mary Hershey sat with her baby in her arms, little Amos and little David walked sedately about.

"Good morning," said William. "How are you, Betsey, and how's poor Tilly? We're coming soon to see you."

"She's not good," answered Betsey, selecting a seat. She did not smile at the children or answer William's announcement of his visit; she merely turned her face to the wall and sat motionless. Her black bonnet hid her eyes, her stout shoulders were bent, her woe was so apparent that the members entering happily from the morning sunshine were cast down. Was poor Tilly, indeed, doomed to blindness?

Elder Nunnemacher did not appear and William Hershey preached a short sermon. He selected his subject for the benefit of Betsey, pointing to the joys of Heaven as a reward for the sufferings of earth, not dreaming that Betsey believed herself shut out of Heaven. Her heart sank lower and lower, her lips trembled, she could scarcely restrain herself from crying out. She knew that everybody was looking at her and feeling sorry for her and the devil tempted her again through self-pity.

"You have nobody in the world but Tilly. You're not rich. You have no husband and no children. Life has cheated you. Take what pleasure you can. Show some spirit. Don't make a fool of yourself."

"I will make confession," said Betsey in her soul.

"Wait till after the hymn, anyhow," advised the devil.

"No," said Betsey. As William finished she rose slowly. "I have something to say," she announced in a muffled tone.

In the silence which followed Betsey looked at the floor. The Shindledeckers never spoke in meeting; they never spoke to any one who did not first speak to them; they almost never went from home and they never willingly admitted strangers to their house. There was, their friends believed, no one in the world so shy. And here was Betsey on her feet. All sorts of wild notions flew through their astonished minds. Was Tilly dead and had Betsey lost her reason?

"I must confess my sins," declared Betsey in a stronger tone. "I've done wrong. I've done what is forbidden among us: I've read a worldly book. It's a large book with pictures, called 'The Courier of the Czar.'" "The Courier of the Czar" was only a secondary title; upon the real name, "Michael Strogoff," Betsey did not dare to venture; as it was she pronounced Czar in two syllables, the first *k*. "It was called 'The Courier of the K-zar.'"

She was heard not with disapproval but with stupefaction; her audience did not understand what she meant. They knew the Bible and the hymnal and some of them knew the Martyr Book but they knew no other literature. They did not know the word "courier" nor the word "K-zar." Betsey saw their stupefaction.

"A courier is a messenger," she explained. "He's one that carries messages and goes on errands. A K-zar is a king."

Still all the Hersheys and Erlenbaughs and Stauffers looked at her blankly.

"It's a story," she went on. "We have stories in the Bible and stories in the Martyr Book. But we know all the stories in the Bible and the Martyr Book by heart. This is a new story. This man is to carry a message for the K-zar to his brother who's in a city with enemies all around it. He must go three thousand miles through enemies and forests

and across great rivers. The Susquehanna is nothing to those rivers. A wicked man, Ivan, catches him; and in order to make him tell who he is he takes his mother and puts a sword in front of her and is going to whip her and when she shrinks from the whip the sword will pierce her. That's what he does. It's like you read in the Martyr Book when they burned the people and drowned them. Then when this courier defended his poor mother this Ivan burned his eyes with a hot sword and made him blind." Betsey's tongue failed her on this word, she repeated it and her effort produced a prolonged and tragic sound—"b-l-i-n-d!"

"But he went on and on and a young girl helped him. They find a good young man who's their friend and this Ivan has had him buried in the sand up to his neck and big birds get after him and he dies. They come at last to the place where he's to give his message to the brother of the K-zar and they're floating on an iceberg down the river and there are springs of something like coal-oil near the river and it's on fire and they're floating on the ice in the midst of the fire."

Stupefaction continued but it was now not the stupefaction of amazement but of enchantment. Betsey told her story well and every eye was fixed upon her; every pair of lungs was either full of air or empty of air; inhalation and exhalation had ceased.

Betsey, alas, ceased also.

"That's as far as I have gone," she said, exhausted. "But I'm going to finish this book. I'm going to finish it this afternoon on the Sabbath, whether or no."

Now eye met eye, colour came back into pale cheeks. The prevailing expression was one of excitement touched with horror. Betsey remained standing; she seemed about to leave; as though, willing to bear the consequences of her crime, she would excommunicate herself and depart. Only William Hershey was able to reason. He rose slowly, his gentle bearded face turned toward Betsey. Were there tears in William Hershey's eyes?

"Betsey," said he, slowly. "Do you do this for your poor sister?"

Betsey seized the back of the bench before her. She looked smitten, as he looks the secret of whose heart is discovered.

"Don't blame Tilly. The doctor says she must be yet for

a long time in the dark. She knows the Bible and the Martyr Book and the hymns and now her mind has to work all the time on itself."

"You're reading this to her?"

"I'm reading it aloud," said Betsey, stubbornly. "If she listens I can't help it."

"Sit down," bade William, gently and commandingly. "It's here something that this sister must decide. She must do what she thinks is right. Let us sing Number Thirty-seven."

But Betsey was not through.

"I like this reading," she confessed, wildly. "I don't feel wicked in my sin. It makes me feel good, it sort of clears out my soul. I would rather read than quilt. And we have fifty-eight quilts. Many times Tilly and I wept over the poor martyrs—why should we not weep over these poor others? Our forefathers fought with wolves where this meeting-house now stands. The Hersheys were in it, I'll bet, and the Stauffers and the Erlenbaughs—all had to fight. I forgot to say that when this poor courier of the K-zar and the young girl were floating down the fiery river the wolves got after them. They——"

William Hershey was alarmed; he despaired of Betsey's reason. He started Hymn Number Thirty-seven.

The stewed chicken and the mashed potatoes and dried corn and slaw and cherry pie which composed the Shindledecker dinner were consumed and all evidences of the meal removed. The cat lay on his chair; he slept, then woke and looked about, then slept again. Betsey went to the porch to hang up the dish-towels and the dog came back with her. He had an expectant air and when he lay down he did not rest his head on his paws, but kept it high. Below her black bandage Tilly's mouth looked happy. Betsey was pale, but she, too, looked happy. Tilly's head turned, following her sister as though she could see. She looked impatient.

Betsey opened the door of the ancient cupboard and got out a book. The doctor knew now where his book was and he had promised Tilly to bring her others by the same author. One was called "A Journey to the Moon," another "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." But Tilly knew there

was no book like this in the world and she meant to ask Betsey to read it again and perhaps again. Her necessity knew no consideration for others; she would take all the blame for Betsey's sin if there were blame; but Betsey must read.

"I'm ready," she said. The smile on her face was beatific.

Betsey opened the book. Forsaking one of the unities, the author had brought the villainous Ivan into the foreground of the narrative. Himself disguised as the Courier of the Czar he had entered the besieged city and was about to betray it. Upon him in a room of the Grand Duke's palace, having escaped the burning river, came the real courier led by his faithful maiden. In terror, Betsey laid the book upon her knee.

"Now everything is at an end," she warned her sister. "Remember he cannot see, and here is this wicked Ivan who can see. What can he do?" Her face was pale. "You must be prepared, Sister."

Tilly clasped her hands.

"Go on," she said, weakly. "I'm ready."

Betsey's eyes travelled down the page.

"Oh, Sister!" she cried, sharply.

"What is it?" asked Tilly.

"Oh, listen!"

"Go on!" urged Tilly.

"'Ivan uttered a cry,'" read Betsey. "'A sudden light flashed across his brain. "He sees!" he exclaimed, "he sees!" And like a wild beast trying to retreat into its den, step by step, he drew back to the edge of the room.'"

"He's not blind, then?" gasped Tilly. "But it said he was blind!"

Betsey read on:

"'Stabbed to the heart the wretched Ivan fell.'"

"But how——"

Betsey lifted her hand for silence. Here were medical words she could not pronounce, but she could give the blessed sense of what she saw.

"Listen once! When they held the hot sword before his eyes, he was crying to think of his poor mother and his tears saved his eyesight."

"Oh, I'm thankful to God," cried Tilly. "Oh, read that part again, dear sister."

Betsey looked out the window; she needed suddenly a wider view than she could get across the kitchen, broad as it was. She looked out the window to the east then out the window to the west. She rose and walked first to the one then to the other.

"Oh, do read it again!" besought Tilly. "Just once, Sister. I'll ask for no more. Oh, please!"

Betsey gazed out as though at some strange phenomenon. There was a truly strange phenomenon to be seen.

"Oh, I would like to hear it again," begged Tilly. When Betsey did not answer she was terrified. "Why don't you speak to me, Betsey?"

Another person spoke for Betsey. The door opened and the two Stauffer sisters came in. They were about the same age as the Shindledeckers and like them one was tall and stout and the other tall and thin. From under their black bonnets they looked out, at once eager and guilty and excited.

"We came——" began one and looked at her sister.

"We came to see how that fine man got through," finished the sister. "We came to see if he's yet alive. It's surely no sin!"

Betsey stood looking at them and then out the window. Utterly bewildered, Tilly sat turning her bandaged face first in one direction then in the other.

"Spare your wraps," invited Betsey, pleasantly. She looked across the fields to the south and saw Eleazar Herr approaching with his long stride, and down the road to the east and saw six Erlenbaughs walking in procession, and up the road to the west and saw William Hershey's heavily laden buggy. If she was not mistaken Mary was in it and the baby and the little boys.

Her heart swelled; William's approach removed her last lingering sense of wrong-doing. It had been delightful to have Tilly hang upon her words, it had been thrilling to hold the Improved New Mennonite congregation spellbound; now she would have both pleasures in one. She would make these people sad and then how happy! The muscles of her arms tingled as though preparing for dramatic gestures.

"Wait once a little," she said, addressing Tilly. "Then I will begin again in the beginning."

'LIJAH

By EDGAR VALENTINE SMITH

From *Harper's*

FORTUNE had long since ceased to smile on the last master of Holmacres. Then, suddenly, with the advent of the strangers and the coincident creation of 'Lijah, came, too, the visit of the angels.

The two strangers—being strangers—of course, knew nothing of the evil days that had befallen Judge Holmsted, nor were they particularly interested, since their mission concerned not the fortunes, either good or ill, of others but the betterment of their own. What they knew concerning the Judge and Holmacres—other than the fact that the two were intimately connected with the business which was bringing them to the place—was furnished by the aged Negro, who, with his ramshackle surrey and ancient nag, eked out a precarious existence driving occasional transients about the countryside. They had found him at the railway station in Wynnesborough, the county seat, and he had driven them along the five miles of deep-rutted road that stretched from the town to Holmacres. Being old, he was naturally garrulous.

For a long time he had sat fidgeting on the front seat of the vehicle, one ancient ear cocked rearward, listening to the unfamiliar accent of the strangers' speech. Finally, during a lull in their conversation, curiosity overpowered him and he half-faced about.

"'Scuse me, gen'lemens," he observed, ingratiatingly, "I don't mean no hahm by astin' it, but—you all is Yankees, ain't you?"

"Northerners—yes," one of them answered, smiling. "Why do you ask?"

"Yessuh. I thought so. You jus' don't talk like white folks—I *means* like *us's* white folks, Boss."

The stranger who had answered the query—the younger and less grave-appearing of the two—smiled again. "We'd heard so much of your Southern hospitality that we thought we'd come down and see what it is like."

"Hawspitality? Well, suhs, you is comin' to de place wheah it was invented at—when you comes to see de Judge."

Then the old man—product of a bygone day and still living in the memory of its glories—described the hospitality of Holmacres as it had been and as he still saw it. It was the most fertile plantation in the country, and its owner, Judge Holmsted, by odds the richest man, the most learned lawyer, the noblest gentleman, and the most open-handed host who ever breathed. His house was the finest that had ever been built; he set the most sumptuous table in the land; niggers fought for the privilege of working for him, even accepting the humblest tasks merely for the honour of being counted among the Judge's retinue. Judge Holmsted, to sum it up, was real "quality"; not like some of the trash which had sprung up with the last generation.

Thus the strangers were prepared in a measure for the picture which greeted them a few moments later: a grove of broad-topped live oaks, with the house in the near distance, a mansion of cement-walled, slate-roofed dignity, with the huge-columned, two-storied veranda reaching in stately welcome across its entire front. And as they stepped from the conveyance and came up the cape-jasmine-bordered walk, another picture was limned before them: a man well past threescore who had risen from his chair. He had removed his broad-brimmed hat, baring a mane of iron-gray hair, and now stood, despite the dingy frock coat that he wore, a figure as imposing as one of his own Ionic columns, courteously expectant at the visitors' approach.

The young stranger introduced his companion and himself. They were from the North, as he had explained to the ancient driver, and their business was that of timberland investors. One of their agents had sent reports of hardwood acreage adjacent to the Tombigbee, and they were making a personal trip of inspection. They wished to find a place—a boarding or lodging house, perhaps—closer to the river than the county

seat. Did Judge Holmsted know of such a place? They would be in the vicinity for several days.

Masters of Holmacres, since that first one who had erected a mansion in what was at that time a wilderness, had been famed for their hospitality. Nor had they been content with the thought that the neighbouring gentry only should be the recipients of their bounty, for that first one, a little strangely perhaps for one of cavalier forbears, had caused to be carved beneath the broad fire mantel in the central hall this inscription:

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Judge Holmsted was of that breed. "I couldn't think of letting you gentlemen stay anywhere but here." He spoke with a soft slurring of r's and a dropping of final g's which any attempt to put into print serves only to distort and make grotesque. "You must do me the honour of becoming my guests during your stay."

The older stranger demurred. "Why . . . that's awfully kind of you, Judge. But we really couldn't take advantage of your hosp——"

"You'll be taking no advantage at all, sir." There was no hint of subservience in the way the Judge said "sir." It was the courteous form of address toward strangers which had been the custom during his youth. "On the contrary, you'll really be doing me a favour. I'm an old man, gentlemen"—his smile would have won them had they really been hesitant at accepting his hospitality—"a little lonely at times, and I like company. And visitors, nowadays, are rare."

The strangers accepted the invitation with suspicious readiness. They hailed the ancient driver of the surrey, who had remained waiting in the driveway and who now brought in their luggage. For just a moment Judge Holmsted seemed ever so slightly embarrassed, a slight flush mantled his cheeks. And then, without stopping to think what it might mean, he created—'Lijah.

"Be seated, gentlemen," he invited, "while I call someone to bring in your baggage." He took a step toward the broad doorway. "'Lijah!" he called. There was no answer. He called again, more loudly, "'Lijah!" and still no one answered. Frowning, he walked to the end of the veranda, and peering

about, shouted the name for the third time, with the same result as before.

He turned apologetically to his guests. "That trifling rascal," he explained, "is never about, particularly at this season of the year, when I need him." He glanced about for the driver of the surrey, but the old man had gone. "Come with me, gentlemen." Taking up their luggage, he led them within the house.

Though his welcome to the strangers had been extended in all sincerity (he had not been a Holmsted had it been otherwise) their coming brought a problem—another one—to the Judge. And, somehow, in his declining years life seemed to hold little else save problems, and all of them as yet unsolved.

Time had been when Holmacres threw its doors wide open to the countryside, for its masters had lived in the traditions handed down by its founder. Even now Judge Holmsted, daydreaming at times, permitted his thoughts to stray back to the days when servants swarmed about the place, when there were stableboys who seemed actually to get underfoot, and house boys who fairly haunted the guests, eager to be of the slightest service. The big stable had contained riding and driving horses, which were not merely to be had for the asking but were almost forced on one. There had been dogs for the fall quail shooting, and master and guests had ridden to hounds. But now . . . it seemed that there remained little of misfortune that could happen. For of the hospitality for which Holmacres had been famous there existed but a shell, a shell so fragile that it might be crushed at any moment. Pity, too, that he, the last of his race, should not maintain the heritage which was his!

Had he belonged to that modern school which placed the mere god of commercialism above neighbourliness, he might still have kept himself from actual want. But a friend in financial straits had come to him, and it was a neighbourly act to indorse a note for a large sum of money. It was a hideous fate, though, that caused the friend to die, leaving an estate heavily encumbered, and forced the Judge to pay the indebtedness by mortgaging the home of his ancestors.

Even before this, though, the soil of Holmacres, planted for generations exclusively to cotton, had been growing less and less fruitful. Judge Holmsted had seen the yield dwindle

year by year. He had divided the plantations into small farms for tenants. Then the northern exodus had begun, one by one the tenants had left, until now, with the few hired "hands" that he could secure, he was cultivating perhaps one-tenth of his tillable lands.

Still, for a time he had not experienced want. His salary as judge of the circuit—which position he had graced for thirty years—while not munificent had enabled him to make a pretence of the hospitality that had brought fame to Holmacres.

Then a new order of things came to pass. Politics was played with the precision—and the heart—of a machine. Those in control of the political destinies of the counties composing the circuit banded themselves together—that is, all of them save Judge Holmsted. Old-fashioned jurist that he was, he refused to lend himself to what he considered certain questionable pre-election machinations. Then the ultimatum went forth: he could submit or take the consequences—political oblivion. He accepted the gage, for he came not only of a hospitable but of a combative breed.

Hitherto his mere announcement that he would be a candidate for nomination at the Democratic primaries had assured his re-election. Now, for the first time in his life, he entered upon a vigorous campaign. He travelled incessantly about the various counties of his circuit, spending, legitimately, of his slender means. He made countless speeches, he met hundreds of friends and received—promises.

He returned to the practice of law in Wynnesborough, but it seemed that his methods, like himself, had become old-fashioned. Friends insisted that he retained too much conscience to compete with more modern and, in certain instances, as he maintained, less ethical procedures than met his ideals.

"The practice of law," he had said once, when the matter came up, "is an honourable profession. It was never intended that it should degenerate into a display of legal acrobatics."

Clients were few and those who came were not always of the soundest financial standing. But there was always more or less bickering and litigation between the poorer class of hill-farmers, and some of these brought their troubles to

Judge Holmsted. They paid their accounts in various ways: some brought small lots of cotton, others poultry and pigs, while one, an aged bachelor recluse of uncertain temper, just before his death had willed to the judge forty acres of land. This, people inclined to be humorous asserted, was in the way of a subtle revenge, for the Judge, suing for the old man, had lost his case, and the hill forty, as it was known, was not considered worth the tax payments.

There had been excessively poor crops. Years, too, when the cotton raised had not paid operating expenses. Twice the Judge had borrowed money—which he still owed—in advance on his crops. And the present outlook, with the late spring rains and cultivation sadly hampered, was now worse than ever.

Even his plainly dwindling income did not cause him to forsake his ideals. These, he insisted, one must cling to, even though he go down with them. Certain other changes, though, had forced themselves on him. Horses and other stock had been sold, since the plantation would not longer support them in numbers. Now all that remained were a few work mules and the Judge's own mount, Grover Cleveland. Servants were dispensed with until all of them, save one, had gone. She stayed.

Christened Alabama, she was variously called Miz' 'Bama, Sis 'Bama, and 'Bama, the form of address depending on the degree of intimacy she permitted the speaker, the Judge and those of her race whom she considered her equals using the last named. She had remained at Holmacres after all the others had left, though her wage was more often a mirage than a reality. Latterly, continued urging by certain of her friends that she leave Judge Holmsted's service and go to the city, where her skill as a cook would return her a fabulous income, always met with scornful rebuff.

"But he ain't payin' you nothin'," the tempter would insist.

"'Sposin' he ain't?" 'Bama, hands on her ample hips, would face the speaker. "You is fergittin' somep'm, ain't you? What 'bout my social p'sition?"

Usually this ended the discussion, for 'Bama, born and reared in the atmosphere of Holmacres, was the recognized leader of her people in the vicinity. No wedding was complete without her in the rôle of general adviser and master of

ceremonies, nor was any funeral fittingly held without her presence to lend due solemnity to the occasion. But sometimes argument failed to convince those who tried to tempt her. Then 'Bama would fall back on flat refusal.

"Go 'way, nigguhs!" she would command. "I wouldn't leave 'is heah plantation foh—foh a *hund'ed dolluhs a yeah!*"

So she remained steadfast at Holmacres as general house factotum for the Judge. It was 'Bama who tactfully reminded him, at those times when the larder became more depleted than usual, that supplies were needed. And it was she who, out of the merest nothing, could serve food fit for a king's banquet. It was 'Bama who attended to the laundry —carefully washing the Judge's shirts to save the frayed cuffs as much as possible—and looked after the scanty supply of household linen. She darned Judge Holmsted's socks, saw that his shiny coat was occasionally brushed, and kept him generally from being out at elbows in the matter of clothing.

Her manifold duties had brought her to the front of the house that afternoon when the Judge summoned the mythical 'Lijah. For a moment she listened in open-mouthed amazement. Then understanding of a sort came to her, as she peeped between the curtains and saw the strangers. For some reason Judge Holmsted wanted it understood that a personage who answered—or should answer—to the name of 'Lijah belonged about the place. And any undertaking that the Judge set on foot was worth seeing to its conclusion. While she lacked the Judge's creative ability, she could, at least, embellish that which he had made. Her first attempt was in evidence that evening when she served a supper that would have tickled the palate of a gourmand.

"Judge," she remarked, taking the privilege of an old servant, "does you know, suh, 'at triflin' 'Lijah ain't got back till yit?"

Judge Holmsted choked momentarily; he seemed to experience sudden difficulty with his food, but he recovered his self-control instantly.

"He hasn't?" he demanded, sternly. "Won't he ever learn to come in on time? Tell him that I wish to speak with him the moment he gets in."

"Yessuh. I knows wheah he's at. He's down to 'at river, settin' out catfish lines."

'Bama had cast the die. Judge Holmsted's creation of 'Lijah had been the result of a sudden—and now inexplicable—impulse; probably, upon reflection, he would have made no further reference to him. But 'Bama had given entity to the myth; with a word or two she had made of it an outstanding personality: a house servant who, by implication at least, took whatsoever liberties he chose.

And suddenly the realization came to the Judge that his creation had been nothing short of inspiration. With the present state of affairs at Holmacres, numberless things were sure to happen which might cause embarrassment to one who sought to fill the rôle of dutiful host; and the lack of a perfect hospitality, in many instances, could be blamed on the erring—though mythical—'Lijah.

"He's one of the older servants about the place," the Judge explained casually to his guests. "Does pretty much as he pleases."

He followed this with a laughing remark about 'Lijah's fondness for fishing. It was almost impossible to keep a Negro and a river apart when the catfish were biting.

"I'd like very much to see 'Lijah." It was the younger stranger speaking. "I've read so many stories dealing with Southern plantation life—and especially the old family servants—that I've often wanted to see one of them. And your man, 'Lijah, seems to be typical."

"Oh, he'll be about the place—off and on," the Judge assured, carelessly. "And if you're interested in types, sir, you'll probably like 'Lijah."

Thus for the moment he dismissed 'Lijah. But 'Bama, apparently, was determined not to let the errant one off so easily, for, later, as the Judge and his guests entered the high-ceilinged living room, where portraits of earlier Holmsteds gave greeting from their oval walnut frames, she came to the doorway.

"Judge," she observed, meaningly, "I don't s'pect you'll hahdly find no seegars. I seed 'Lijah sof'-footin' it round 'at sec'ta'y whilse I was dustin' 'is mawnin'."

Mechanically, Judge Holmsted's eyes sought the old rosewood secretary in one corner of the room, but before he could speak the younger stranger broke in with:

"Oh, that's all right, Judge." He was laughing heartily

as he extended a cigar case. "Take one of these. So, he 'borrows' your cigars, does he? I've simply *got* to see him."

The strangers spoke of their business in the vicinity. The timber which they wished to inspect lay some miles away and, although their actual cruising of it would be done on foot, they would need some kind of conveyance to take them to their starting point. They supposed an automobile could be obtained in Wynnesborough?

Guests beneath Holmacres' roof had never been compelled to hire conveyances. It would have been unthinkable. The Judge explained that the swamp roads were in such condition that an automobile would be impracticable. He had never bought a car himself for this reason. His guests must use one of the numerous horses about the place. He would have 'Lijah hitch one of them to the buggy. It would be the very thing for their trips.

When one of them, giving as an excuse their long railroad journey, suggested retiring, Judge Holmsted, first ascertaining that 'Lijah was nowhere to be found, led them up the broad, winding stairway to their room. He lighted the kerosene lamp. Then, carelessly turning back the bed covering, he stopped in sudden horror. There was only one sheet on the bed!

He turned, his face crimsoning, to his guests They had seen. "That trifling, worthless——" he began, and stopped. "It's 'Lijah—of course, gentlemen—as usual," he said, helplessly. "Come with me."

He led them to another room—his own—which for more than forty years no one save himself had occupied. This, he knew, would be in readiness. It always was, for he was fastidious about certain things, among them fresh bed linen. 'Bama attended to that.

"Just leave your shoes outside the door, gentlemen," he said in parting. "'Lijah will polish them."

He found 'Bama in the kitchen. Her answer to his question about the sheets brought home to him dishearteningly the scarcity of household linen.

In the library he picked up the latest issue of the Wynnesborough *Clarion*, a weekly newspaper published in the county seat, but he could not fasten his thoughts on the printed page.

There were weightier things to be considered. Plainly, the visit of the strangers—should it prove of some duration—meant a still further drain on the slender resources of Holmacres. Since he had promised his guests the use of a horse, they would have to take Grover Cleveland. The Judge sighed. All of the work-mules were sadly needed, but he must use one of them for his daily trips to his office. By waiting until the strangers had left every morning, though, and remaining at his office till he was sure they had returned, they need never know of the subterfuge he had resorted to for their convenience.

Another matter claimed his attention: the disquieting letter—rather the letter that spelled doom—which had come that morning. The interest payment on the mortgage would be due shortly, and the letter stated brusquely that the mortgage had passed into other hands. Hereafter all payments must be met at maturity. Covetous eyes, Judge Holmsted knew, had long looked toward Holmacres. Once or twice he had succeeded in having his payments extended, but now . . . alien owners—people with no reverence for its traditions—would come into possession of the place. The thought was bitter—unbearable.

Once—more than twoscore years ago—the Judge had hoped that an heir might succeed to his name and estate. But with the passing of the one who could have made this a reality, this hope, too, had died. Better so, he comforted himself now; far better that the odium for failure to live up to Holmacres' heritage be his than that it should have been shifted to a son who would have borne his name.

He mounted the stairs. Just outside the door of his guests' room he found their shoes.

And that night—and for succeeding nights—he slept in the bed that had but one sheet.

But his guests at the breakfast table next morning probably thought that his only solicitude lay in planning for their well-being. He was sorry that, owing to 'Lijah's shiftlessness—the black rascal!—he had been compelled to make such short shift for them on the previous night. He hoped they had rested well.

After breakfast they found Grover Cleveland, freshly curried and rubbed till his coat shone like satin, hitched to

the buggy ready for their trip. The vehicle itself bore signs of recent washing; the harness, too, one would have said, had been freshly oiled.

"I wonder how we're going to begin talking business to a man who treats us like members of his family," the older stranger said as he climbed into the vehicle. "We'll have to use a lot of diplomacy."

"We'll just remember," the younger man reminded, "that we've come several hundred miles to secure a property at as favourable terms to ourselves as possible. And that business is business—always."

Judge Holmsted waited only long enough to see his guests off. Then he walked to one of the fields where a Negro was ploughing.

"Eph," he said, "I'll have to be using the mule for a few days."

"But, Judge, suh!" Eph stared, gaping. "Dis grass! It's plum' ram-pant since 'em las' rains, suh. Can't you see it's jus' nachelly chokin' de cotton to death?"

The Judge could see, plainly enough. The spindling stalks of cotton were struggling weakly through mazes of Johnson and Bermuda grasses. But he saw something else, too; something that Eph, being a recent comer, could not have seen or, seeing, could not have understood: there were guests beneath Judge Holmsted's roof.

It was the first time that he had ridden a mule since he was a boy. Often then, in a spirit of mischief, he had done so. Things had changed now. Horses . . . dogs . . . servants . . . gone. Everything! Everything save the will to be a hospitable host.

At the little bank in town he was courteously but firmly refused an additional loan. The bank officials liked the Judge—and sympathized with him—but his previous loans were still outstanding. And it was doubtful—exceedingly doubtful—that his crop that year would pay the cost of raising it.

But that evening, as he sat with his guests on the broad veranda, he was solicitous only as to the result of their investigations. Were they finding the hardwood timber of good quality? And was it in sufficient quantity to justify them in purchasing and logging it? He hoped this might

be the case; he was looking forward with a great deal of pleasure to welcoming them as permanent neighbours.

He proved himself to be a raconteur of rare ability and charm. The grave-faced stranger seemed fascinated by his stories as he spoke of the days when steamboats from Mobile plied the Tombigbee daily. Now there were only one or two boats weekly. But then many were the gay parties that made the round trip. There was always a Negro orchestra on board and stately men and beautiful women, after the dining saloon had been cleared, danced the schottische and the polka until the early hours of morning. More than once, too, a steamer had been forced to pull in to the bank while two young blades went ashore and settled their hot-blooded quarrels according to the code. Judge Holmsted sighed reminiscently. Those had been wonderful days.

The air was soft with the softness of Southern nights. There came to them, as they sat there, the odour of cape jasmine and the fainter but more caressing scent of honeysuckle. A light breeze rustled the leaves of the water oaks, shimmering now by the light of the full moon in a mantle of pure silver dust.

The younger stranger lighted a cigar and leaned back in his chair, sighing restfully. "Two weeks of this," he said, "and I shouldn't want to go home. You Southern planters lead an enviable life, Judge."

"It's enchanting," his companion assented.

"We like it, sir—some of us," the Judge admitted. He spoke with a tinge of regret of former neighbours who, one by one, had been lured away by the cities. Many fine old places had been left to the care of tenants and had speedily gone to ruin. But the Holmsteds, being lovers of the land, had always lived close to it. "Maybe we are more firmly rooted in the soil than some of the others were," the Judge said.

"It seems to me, Judge," the grave-faced stranger offered, "that you have a wonderful place here for a stock farm. Aren't these native grasses—I believe you call them Johnson and Bermuda—good for grazing?"

"Excellent, sir."

"That's just what I'd do with this place if I owned it," the younger stranger broke in. He was more outspoken than

his elderly companion. "I'd divide it into pastures with good fences, build up-to-date barns and pig houses, and stock it with blooded cattle and hogs. You've your grasses for spring and summer. And I understand that those river canebrakes make fine winter grazing."

"I may try something of the kind next year," the Judge admitted. "I've been thinking for some time of venturing along that line."

Venturing! Blooded cattle and hogs! Fences and barns, when the burning question was one of bare existence! Not that he had never had dreams. Many times he had pictured his broad lands dotted with droves of sleek cattle and herds of swine, with an income assured that would again crown Holmacres with its fair name for hospitality. But the realization of this dream would require money. . . .

It was the next morning that a mocking bird, nesting in a near-by tree, awakened the serious-faced stranger with its early song. Arising, he crept softly to the window and stood listening. And suddenly, as he looked out, he started and stared fixedly. Then a dull red flush mounted slowly to his cheeks. He withdrew from the window even more softly than he had approached it and lay down again without wakening his companion.

But that morning brought consternation to Judge Holmsted. Modern plumbing had not been installed at Holmacres, and he remembered suddenly that his guests must shave. And there was one item that he had overlooked.

"I suppose, gentlemen," he remarked at the breakfast table, "that 'Lijah—you see I have to keep close check on him—brought you hot water?"

They admitted that he had not.

"He'll be the death of me yet," the Judge said, hopelessly, "if I don't wring his neck soon. He's getting more worthless every day."

The young stranger laughed. "You're more lenient with your servants, Judge, than we'd be in the North. They must attend to their duties there or they're discharged."

"But it's different with us, sir." The Judge smiled. "Take 'Lijah, for example. Been on the place all of his life—going on fifty years. I couldn't get rid of him. If I were

to discharge him he'd refuse to stay discharged. He'd simply come sneaking back and I'd have to feed him."

The younger man's interest in 'Lijah was more intrigued than ever. Returning with his companion earlier than usual one evening, he sought out 'Bama. He was eager, he said, to see 'Lijah. But that worthy, as usual, failed to answer even when 'Bama, standing on the kitchen porch, called his name lustily several times.

"When does he sleep?" the stranger asked. "He doesn't seem to be around the place of nights."

"Sleep? Him sleep? You neentuh worry 'bout 'at, Cap'n. All 'Lijah needs is a sof' place on de shady side of a tree when dey's somep'm needs doin' round de house. He'll 'tend to de sleepin'. Dey's jus' two things 'Lijah's good foh: he de sleep-lovin'es' an' de catfish-ketchin'es' nigguh you eveh seed."

"He's typical all right," the stranger laughed. "And I must see him—I've simply *got* to see him before I leave."

Judge Holmsted found himself gradually forming a sneaking fondness for his creation. Maybe it was because he was unconsciously bringing into being an ideal. For 'Lijah was just the shiftless, work-dodging, cigar-pilfering type that the Judge would have loved—the kind that would run rabbits with his bird dogs—provided the Judge could afford the dogs—or slip his pack of fox hounds out on cold autumn nights—if the Judge should ever own a pack—for surreptitious 'coon and 'possum hunting. Yes . . . that would be just like 'Lijah. Indolent, grumbling always, complaining of a mis'ry in his side; absolutely dependent, thoroughly undependable—and utterly likable. In short, he would be perfect. The Judge even caught himself at times murmuring aloud, "That trifling black rascal!"

But such things—oh, well!—they were dreams, visions that an old man was seeing.

As the strangers showed no signs of terminating their visit, 'Bama, with visions of a rapidly depleted larder, began to experience a real concern. With only the Judge and herself to care for, she could have made shift of some sort. Maybe a hint to Judge Holmsted of the real state of affairs might not prove unavailing. So she tried, very diplomatically, one evening at the supper table, to sound a warning.

"Judge, suh," she remarked, meaningly, "'Lijah is been 'mongst de chickens agi'n."

"What of it?" Judge Holmsted smiled on his guests. 'Lijah, he explained, was probably giving a party for some of his friends. "A few chickens, more or less, don't matter, do they, 'Bama?"

"But dese is *fattenin'* chickens, suh; de onlies' ones I had left."

"You don't mind 'Lijah entertaining his friends, do you?" the talkative stranger asked.

"Not gen'ally; no, suh. But he's been gittin' entirely *too* entertainin' lately."

"Doesn't he catch enough fish for his feasts?"

"Yessuh; he ketches plenty fish. But catfish, you knows, is just a nigguh's reg'lar eatin' victuals. Dey uses de chickens kind o' foh dessert."

"You must find his parties something of a drain on your resources."

"'Tain't no pahty, suh, he's givin' 'is time. It's just a shindig—a plain shindig."

The Judge explained that a shindig was a dance.

"Dance?" The younger stranger seemed amazed. "An old man like 'Lijah?"

"Him dance?" 'Bama gave answer. "Just de thoughts of a fiddle'll send him shufflin' his feets 'cross de flo'—right now! Age ain't purified him none."

'Bama, strictly orthodox in her religious beliefs, was patently outraged by this latest of the hapless 'Lijah's escapades, for as she left the room they heard her muttering:

"An' him wid gran'chillun! I's gwine to have him churched —I *sho*' is!"

Between themselves the strangers discussed the business which had brought them to Holmacres.

"It's showing up even better than the estimate we received," the older man said one evening.

"One of the richest deposits I ever saw," the other admitted.

When they went to their room he complained of not being in the mood for sleeping. The rays of that Southern moon, he said, must have affected him. He felt restless; he'd walk round a bit.

Five minutes later he returned quietly to the house,

mounted the stairs softly, undressed silently, and went to bed.

The next morning as they seated themselves at the breakfast table, 'Bama's voice, raised in loud and indignant self-communion, was heard in the kitchen.

"Co'se, *he* don't keer! Out dere diggin' yearthworms to go fishin' wid an' lettin' all 'em cows an' ca'fs git together! Don't make no diffe'nce to him if us *don't* have no milk foh de cawfee."

It was much better, 'Bama reasoned, to blame this lack on 'Lijah than be compelled to admit that their only cow, bitten by a snake two days previously, had died.

But the younger stranger, usually so talkative when reference was made to 'Lijah, was strangely silent now.

Another day, as the visitors were dressing in their room, the more taciturn one spoke of their business. "I wonder," he asked, "if the Judge knows anything about the value of the property?"

"Oh, yes!" The younger man's loquaciousness had returned. "He knows all about it. I was talking to 'Lijah only yesterday"—he made sudden pretence of searching for something in his travelling bag—"and he said the Judge had received several offers for the property, but that he wasn't eager to sell. Saving it as a sort of nest egg, I was given to understand. In fact, 'Lijah said——"

"So, you've seen him?" At the first mention of the name, the serious-faced stranger had seemed surprised—almost startled. Then a look of comprehension—of complete and sympathetic understanding—lighted his grave features. And, as he smiled softly, tiny wrinkles creased the corners of his eyes. "What's 'Lijah like?"

"Just what I expected. Quite a character. Unique. He let me understand how these Southern planters feel about parting with any of their landholdings. From what 'Lijah said, the Judge probably wouldn't even name a figure if we were to approach him on the matter. And don't forget that it would be fatal even to think of trying any haggling or 'jewing down.' He doesn't want for money, with this plantation bringing in a steady income and all the servants he needs. That's not even considering what he gets out of his law practice. Now, I'd suggest——"

"Just a moment!"

At the interruption the voluble young stranger looked up from his travelling bag. Something that he saw—maybe it was the quiet smile in his companion's eyes—sent an answering flash into his own.

"We're partners," the serious-faced man reminded him, "and ought to be frank with each other. Just how long have you known the actual conditions here? That 'Lijah is a myth? That it's the Judge who has been polishing our shoes——"

"And washing that damned old buggy!" The younger man's face was crimson. "And letting us have his saddle horse—the only one on the place—while he rode a mule! Think of it! That hospitable old aristocrat! Poverty-stricken! My God, I——" He stammered and stopped.

"We both understand, I guess." The quiet-spoken man extended his hand, which was grasped in silence.

That evening they announced to Judge Holmsted that, having finished their inspection, they were ready to return home. After thanking the Judge for his hospitality, the younger stranger broached the matter of business. They were not only timberland investors, it appeared, but dealt also in other property. But, as he tried diplomatically to come to the subject uppermost in his mind, he seemed strangely ill at ease for one accustomed to business deals of magnitude. And finally, instead of the tactful approach which he had planned, he came very bluntly to the point.

"There's a deposit of mica on that hill forty of yours, Judge," he said simply. "Would you care to sell it?"

That old hill forty! Hope blossomed faintly in Judge Holmsted's breast. The strangers might—it was barely possible that they might—pay enough for that rocky, worthless waste to take care of that threatening interest note. If so, he was assured tenancy of his home for another six months. After that . . .

But the stranger was speaking again. "We realize, Judge, that, between gentlemen, there should be no haggling over such a thing as price. We've talked it over, my friend and I, and have decided to offer you just what the property is worth to us."

That faint gleam of hope flickered and died. Evidently the strangers considered the hill forty almost valueless.

Foolish! Just an old man dreaming . . . Holmacres . . . home of his ancestors . . . home of hospitality. . . .

He heard the stranger's voice again. He was speaking rapidly. "We can offer you, for all rights to the land, fifty thousand dollars."

Fifty thousand dollars! One watching Judge Holmsted closely might have noticed a sudden throbbing of the blue veins at his temples; might have detected a slight tremor in the hand that went up, trying unconcernedly to stroke his gray goatee; might even have observed his other hand grip tightly for a moment the arm of the chair on which it rested. Maybe, in that brief instant, the Judge saw a dream fulfilled: broad fields fenced to pasture and dotted with sleek cattle and fat swine; bottom lands, yellow with ripening corn; barns and outhouses, as befitted a vast estate; Holmacres, with its doors once more flung wide. . . .

But whatever might have been his emotions, he gave no evidence of them, as he answered with his usual grave courtesy:

"So far as I know, gentlemen, the matter can be arranged on that basis."

When the strangers left next morning he expressed regret that he could not accompany them to town, since urgent matters necessitated his presence on the plantation. They could leave Grover Cleveland and the buggy at the livery stable in Wynnesborough. He would send 'Lijah for them.

After they had gone he seated himself before the old rosewood secretary. Maybe he dreamed again . . . of quail hunting during the crisp months of fall . . . of fox hounds in their kennels . . . of servants. Servants?

Suddenly he drew up a sheet of paper and began writing in a firm, precise script. And when he had finished he scanned what he had written:

WANTED: Negro house servant, male, aged fifty, or thereabouts, for light work in plantation home. Must be willing to answer to the name of Elijah. Apply B. L. H. care *Clarion.*

A RIVER COMBINE—PROFESSIONAL

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

From *Argosy All-Story*

I DON'T know 'f I eveh told you about Stepping May or not. She came down the river awhile back in a clinker-built skiff. She was so blamed pretty it was a wonder they ever let her come down the banks onto old Mississip' at all; but theh she was, big as life—about five foot seven tall, and her lips straight and resentful, but her eyes twinkling. You see, a lady lots of times keeps her jaw set square when she'd rather be smiling two foot wide. Lots of men can't let a lady grin without thinkin' she's soft on 'em.

The first test I seen of Stepping May was along about Hickman, Kentucky, one of those mean, miserable days when the autumn northers begin to whisper an' growl down out o' the ice cap mountains. Hadn't begun to rain yet, but hit was mean. I was into my green cabin boat which I bought off a feller who built it up the Alleghany in N'York State to trip down to N'Orleans, but found the Ohio so big he neveh had the grit to see old Mississip' at all. Theh I was, jes' plumb comfy, an' this blamed gal come along—pretty as a picture, an' jes' about as accommodating.

She hearn my fiddle talking along, so she pulled up an' hailed. I stepped outside, not thinkin' what I was doing, an' course, the minute that wind hit my warm fiddle strings, snp! An' I had two broken.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she said, the way a girl does when she knows what she's talking about. "I didn't mean to do that!"

She was cold, her cheeks red, an' her hands reddish. You know how a man feels when he knows he ought to ask a lady something, but expects she'll sure miscue 'im. I had a good

cabin, warm, two chairs—comfortable! I didn't know what to say, so she said hit herself. If only ladies'd speak first their feelings, hit'd be lots nicer, wouldn't it, for men? Lots an' lots of times a man passes up something he'd like to do, probably he'd oughta do, jes' account of him bein' 'fraid a lady'd be insulted, or like that.

"Mr. Man," she said, her eyes sparkling, "I'm 'most froze to death! Won't yo' let me stand by yo' fire an' warm?"

Why, say, I just told that gal she could have my whole blamed shanty boat if hit 'd 'commodate her any. She laughed, and come aboard, dropping a bowline on my bumper cleat, trailing the skiff alongside.

I give her my fiddling chair, but she took t'other one. We sat theh while she warmed her red hands an' I strung up my bow. When I 'gun to play, she turned her head to listen—sharp! Naturally, I ain't much of a talker, far as the ladies is concerned, but they don't embarrass me none when I'm playing, which helps me forget how pretty they is, or something, I don't know what.

She listened so blamed int'rested I was wondering, for the music was "Caving Bends." Yo' know that piece, which started 'way back yonder, which all the riveh fiddlers has played just natural, till now everybody knows hit? Played right, yo' can hear the water suckling an' sawing along the bend, an' then the lumping-lumping down as the ground falls in, a tree swings out and falls a splashing, and all good music, which you can dance by.

"Oh, what's that?" she asked.

I knowed right away she wasn't a riveh gal, but like me, from up the banks, though more recent. So I told her "Caving Bends." Then I told her about some more river music: "Cyclone," "Crossing Ripples," "Steamboat," "Spring Birds," "Cold Winds," "Sandbar Whispers"—theh's a lot of those funny musics that jes' imitate the way the old Mississip' sounds one time an' anotheh, which anybody could play if he's good at slidin' notes an' picking an' knows the riveh.

"Riveh music!" she whispered. "Why—why, I didn't know they had music like that! You know—I dance!"

While I played "Crossing Ripples," she danced, too. Lawse, that gal was steppin'! I jes' looked at her. She was

professional, I could see that—but more than professional, too, somehow. She had to 'dapt her stepping to the music, finding which was best, if shuffling and sliding or tap-tap or lifting and floating. Seemed like I played twict as good as I'd eveh played in my life before.

My cabin was six foot four high, an' there was about eight by ten foot square she could dance in; hit wan't any too much, but she used all the floor an' most of the roof, so to speak. She'd dance a round or two, an' then she'd sit an' ask me questions. That was about the busiest afternoon I remember, and 'fore I knowed hit, night had come, closing down on the riveh like a door, taking me right by surprise!

"Oh, it's dark!" she cried, waking up.

I jumped out, give a look around, an' then pulled for the west bank. Lucky hit was the foot of a long bend, an' I anchored in the eddy at the head of the bar—I don't know which bar, either. Somewhere below Putney Bend, anyhow, an' she stood nervous and doubtful as she looked out into that black night.

"We better cook supper," I told her. "You've a tarpaulin so's you can sleep into your skiff?"

"Oh, yes!" she said. "I sleep into it."

I lighted a big round burner lamp I had, and we stretched her tarpaulin over the hoops, for it seemed like rain was right theh. Then we cooked supper on my oil stove, she being mighty good at hot bread, while I ain't no slouch cooking meat. Course, I'm one of those people that always has a plenty to eat on board, even if I am a fiddler. I made good money. I'd come down the rivers just so I wouldn't be pestifered by neighbours and anybody, practising my music all day an' all night, too, 'f I wanted to. We had a regular meal, which she ate of hearty, as I did, both being right hungry after all the work that afternoon—work we loved, but work, at that.

Afteh supper we cleared the table, washed the dishes—a man sure goes low down, leaving dishes to wash, if he's in a shanty boat. Women can do things like that, but if a man does it, soon he ain't shaving, he don't take his cold bath, an' fustest he knows he's shiftless, no 'count, ragged, dirty, miserable.

I wondered who this girl was, course. She was brave—

Lordy, but it took nerve for her to come down that coiling old running lake if she didn't have to! But she wasn't the kind of a girl anybody asks questions of, free and easy. When she danced she found her skirt too tight, and slipped it off so casual and easy that in trying to run the music right I didn't really notice she was in knickerbockers till afterward. Course, professional people are thataway. In no time we knowed we'd be teaming it.

We both were tired after supper. I stirred up the soft coal I'd found in a tow barge wreck on a sandbar, opening up the front gates in the fireplace stove I had for a heater. She sat into a low rocking chair, and I kittering across from her in an old armchair I'd picked up in a drift pile. I'd relined my shanty cabin with building paper, but some curling wisps of cold circled around from the north wind so the fire felt mighty comfortable.

"How come hit you're a shanty boater?" she asked, quick as that.

Course, nobody asks questions like that down the rivers if you ain't off the bank, or one of them writin' fellers or a sneakin' detective. I couldn't answer first off. A man don't tell even a pretty girl some things, and I mout say, specially a pretty girl. I knewed, though, I'd tell her when I'd laid tongue to words quiet enough to use.

"Why," I answered, careless like, after a minute, "I jes' come down. I jes' took my fiddle an' come down——"

"No, you didn't!" She shook her head. "It wa'n't thataway. You know theory. You've taken lessons—real lessons, on the violin. Nobody who hadn't done that could play river music the way you do. Besides, you talk river talk like you learned it in school."

'Tain't no use trying to fool some women. I never met one I could fool. That's be'n my experience. Perhaps some'rs there's women I could hoodwink, but they ain't on old Mississip'!

"Course, I'm from up the bank," I admitted. "I just tripped away down same's anybody."

"Same as anybody!" she nodded. "That's so—I came because I couldn't stand bein' a dancing girl in a hick town! And you?"

"Why—why——" You know how a man don't talk of

some things when he has to, an' can't get out of it. "I couldn't stand being a fiddler in a hick town, when—when——"

I couldn't say it. Some things hurt too much to say it.

"I know!" she said. "Somebody thought more of good business than of good music?"

"Jes' so!" I told her. "You know some girls, they don't want a fellow, a sweetheart, a husband that don't know nothing but music, sort of no 'count in the chamber of commerce and on Main Street."

"Yes, suh!" she nodded. "I'd no right to ask you. I wanted to know, I had to know. I could tell you was white, honest—the way a good man is when he thinks he's lost out. Musicians, artists, writers—big ones, but undiscovered—always feel they're mean an' trifling beside of good money makers. You're thataway!"

I hadn't never looked at hit before the way she put it. I jes' knowed I had a powerful big ache down around my heart, where I'd felt like a humming bird looking into a big rose in those old days. Yes, suh. Now I saw that girl lookin' into the fire, her eyes full. She had a mighty powerful mouth and jaw, but she hadn't no way of controlling her eyes. They'd twinkle, and they'd fill up, the way they had, feeling sorry for me. I reckon just that one look I had at her face before that fire in the red light—I was obliged to save kerosene, an' she'd turned the light down, knowing it, even if I did have lots to eat on board. You see—well, course a man picks up eats down the rivers—a shoat here, a yearling there; maybe some chicks and so on, besides game, if he's anyways slick and don't givvadamn.

"Prenaux!" she said to me, the first I realized she knew my name. "I was sick of dancing in a hick town. You know those smart city kids, and those big-footed country goofs. They never saw me dance. All they saw was—was legs. So I came down the river! Prob'ly I was a fool, only I wasn't. No, indeed—— The first thing, in less'n ten days I heard your music——"

That's the way we found it down old Mississip'. Lots came down who don't neveh find what they aches for. Men trip down an' down, an' floats, rollin' along the bottom into the gulf at last. Women is thataway, too—young ones an' old ones. But I knowed a preacher once who'd lost his hold,

an' a business man who'd mixed in scandal, an' others what tried to lose themselves down the riveh—an' firstest they knowed the gates of happiness spread wide open for them.

Probably we understood each otheh that night as well as eveh we would. There wan't much talkin' an' explainin'. We jes' had hit in ouh hearts. She stepped back, swung the chair clear, an' stepped four five measures without any music but the voices of the riveh dark—which she heard, an' I heard. She opened the bow door, bowed a pretty curtsy to me, an' shut the wind out the cabin. I caught up a lantern to hand to her, but she had one of her own under the skiff tarpaulin hood. Lawse, but that were a cozy eddy that night!

Well, suh, next day we had breakfast togetheh. She read some music I had, all kinds that I'd picked up for my fiddling. Course, when I came on the riveh, if music wasn't classic I sort of despised hit. But I'd been growing careless. I'd took to admiring the music river fiddlers played, some of it awful to listen to, but always, two three measures, perhaps one piece would be right out of the river's heart. I'd learn that piece. I'd maybe have to smooth it up, for my ear, account of somebody not knowing how to run the times together, or maybe breaking the refrains or splitting up the melodies the way mountain fiddlers do. Well, anyhow, every fiddler fixes his music oveh, according to his notions, the way I did.

An' when we'd settled our breakfasts, resting around, I brought out the old fiddle to tighten up and tune the strings, an she stepped, exercising to take out the kinks the cold an' sleeping on the bottom of her skiff'd hooked into her knees an' joints. An' her dancin' scales was purtier 'n some steppin' of lots of heel-an'-toe folks.

May Gardner was sure wonderful, even in those days, and patient. If some step bothered her, she'd work at it, steady, minutes, hours till she had it to the lift and fall of a ripple, while I played the music she wanted, steady, oveh an' oveh again. I hadn't practised so much as I'd played. I used to let some hard places go. She made me go at those measures till my fingers and my bow'd walk through them, same as her dancing went through the swing, turn and change, the balance and the mark, the beat and the sway—— Lawse, man! Hit

wa'n't no work for me, but she'd toil along till she dropped into a chair, plumb wore out.

"Lucien!" she exclaimed, "you're so good to me. You don't know what it means—this chance to practise this-away!"

You'd think one day was like anotheh, down the reaches and bends. We had to drop down pretty well, account of winter coming on. I remember when the fresh meat was gone, and we was down to sowbelly and corn, for I'd neglected providing. We hadn't any money. I was looking along for a flock of shoats on a bar, or maybe a steer caved down at a riveh bank; you know what I mean. I'd be'n on the riveh so long, staying my appetite thataway, never careless or being caught, that prob'ly I didn't rightly think about hit, the way I should of. I told her I'd have to lift a pig.

"Lucien Prenaux!" she turned on me, hard and set. "You sha'n't!"

We had hit out. She'd rather starve 'n steal, she said, and I hadn't. She had her way. Course, one way it wa'n't none of her business how I found my grub. We weren't nothin' to each other, 'ceptin' we was professional partners. But in a way, we were eatin' together, floatin' down together, an' you mout say, tol'ably close together—if we hadn't be'n, her an' my boat tied together, we'd be'n miles apart, cut away by the current. So we jawed two three days, me not graftin' any meat, an' she arguin' there must be some honest way.

Yes, suh! Theh we was broke. I hadn't a cent. She hadn't any money. She went uptown in Mendova, an' come back smilin'. I was dog-gone hungry, an' she'd lost weight, practisin' on an empty stomach. She let her lips smile, when her eyes twinkled to me.

"We get five dollars for a turn into Palura's!" she told me.

Course it was her steppin', about four fifty for that, an' fifty cents for me. I'd never had the nerve to play for the public thataway, but she made me. We done a turn that night on Palura's stage. He was a flat-face feller, who'd killed three four men, an' his place was a show for everybody from N'Orleans to St. Louis.

I felt mighty swell when I sat in the corner, an' she came walkin' down in those white satin knickerbockers she'd put

on special. I was jes' in my old pants, for I hadn't any other, an' a woollen shirt. I played for her to come a walking. Lawse! She'd jes' had them old knickers practising. Now she was like a white rose grown up around a pink rose, for she was white an' pink dressed—and step? Seemed just like she'd practised till now she was right.

Yes, suh! She was like a chimney swift flying, like a tall tree leaning before a strong wind, like the running waves on the flowing riveh—she just danced as natural as anything pretty you all eveh saw in motion, and not one step that wasn't beautiful. She danced fourteen minutes—that's how long it takes to play "Crossing Ripples" the way I do it, an' she faded out on it the way the riveh runs down a crossing into the fog, or night in a fast, bright sunset.

Yes, suh! Those people, up the bankers an' steamboaters, didn't make a sound or motion till long afteh I'd took down my fiddle an' was tightening up the E string. Seemed like the best we had to do wa'n't nothing to them. I felt like it wa'n't no use. I wanted to take May in my arms an' tell her we didn't cyar a whoopin' damn what they thought—them—slam!

Yes, suh! Those quality folks, who was spreein' down to Palura's, come down on the floor with both feet, an' split their gloves or stung their palms. I'd be'n afeared maybe Palura'd welch on that five dollars an' we'd be hongry. Instead of that, when we was back in, he come an' handed May a twenty-dollar note, an' me the same. Forty dollars! I looked at hit. Seemed like it was a mistake—me twenty dollars! Just for fiddlin' that riveh piece.

Then Palura shoves us out on the stage again. I stood there flustered an' ready to cut an' run. May put her arm around my shoulders.

"Dear old boy! Dear old boy!" she exclaimed. "Let's have that 'Flying Swans' piece!"

'Tain't much of a piece. Watching the black geese, an' whooping cranes, an' brent an' Canadian geese flying by away up in the blue sky, their wings flashing in the sunshine, I'd—well, kind of set their motion to music. She always liked that piece. Course, no man can really set birds a-flyin' to music. Not Chopin, or Beethoven, or Wagner—not anybody. But I'd made kind of a pitiful little stagger at it,

which she loved, account of how much she thought of me. You know the way women is—anything somebody they like does is sorta int'restin' to them.

So I played what she said. I couldn't think of nothin' else. So she danced, which took their attention off what I was playing—and watching her, you know, she carried my music right along! I almost forgot I was playing. Yes, suh—she flew down the stage like great white swans fly down the line travelling out of the north, white, strong, shimmering. Lawse! Lawse! Seemed just like those quality folks sporting in Palura's inspired her to dance. An' I felt an ache in my heart, yes, suh!

You know how a man feels about a beautiful woman. He wants her to know how much he admires her. He wants to put at her feet all that he's got, all that he eveh can be in God's world. He'd put down his bleeding heart, with all its aches, for her to walk on; an' the pain of hit 'd be the greatest joy that he'd eveh known! All that kind of stuff—you know what I mean. An' he knows he cain't he'p her none. He cain't make her no better than he can he'p an oriole to sing, or an American lotus blossom to be lovely. All he can do is jes' wish he mout he'p some. An' then his heart aches, for all he'd like to do—an' afteh all, it's somebody else that can he'p her. Theh those folks was—an' she danced like she'd neveh danced before, for them.

An' afteh hit was all oveh, those quality men came a walking up, a bowing in their dress suits, an' the women who'd split their gloves came up, and account of there bein' such a crowd around May they come to me, to talk, and tell me how nice it all was, May's dancing. And I stood there in those old clothes of mine, feelin' like the shanty-boater I was. Yes, suh. I don't s'pose theh's any more miserable feelin' in this world 'an I had, seein' those men around May, an' how she laughed, her cheeks colouring up. Lawse! Lawse! How mighty triflin' a man is, if he ain't much 'count out in the world!

They was one feller there, he come from the op'ry house, an awful swell, dressed right up to the handle. He took May off, by herself, an' she called me in, too. I wondered about that, but seems he wanted her to come up an' dance on his stage, too. Palura he cussed and squabbled around about

it, argying. 'Fore we knowed it we had quite a job, May an' me did, teaming it.

We walked down Ferry Street to our boats, which we'd left with Jim Horseshoe, at the landing. She come on board my boat, to warm, for the night was fresh, walking down. She danced; in the cold it chilled her; I hated to think of her going out into that chilly rag shack over her skiff.

"Yo'll catch cold!" I told her. "All het up, thisaway!"

She looked at me, first into one eye, then into the otheh, with both her eyes. By an' by she laughed a low, funny little chuckle.

"You dear boy!" she said, jes' like that. "Just to please you—I'll take your bed to-night!"

So I went out into her skiff, mighty glad she'd have that comfy cabin to sleep in. In the morning she put her arms around my neck, when I came in, looking at me, smiling, sorry.

"Am I mean, making you sleep out there in the cold?"

That night we played, regular in the theatre. May caught the crowd. They throwed bouquets at her, an' we was called the "River Number," just like that. Her dancing to my music was "wonderful entertainment," they said in the newspapers. In a month we'd saved about six hundred dollars.

I wasn't happy any more. If I'd come off down the rivers, account of my being just a fiddler, and the girl I thought so much of back there shook me for a fellow making twenty dollars a week—she hadn't any voice, she couldn't dance, an' wa'n't nothing but pretty—now I was ready to go back up the bank. The way folks crowded around May, coming back, to see her—and to ask me about her, men an' women!

Oh, I knowed I loved her! One woman come to me, a swell-looking woman, wearing jewels an' clothes all shimmering and perfume. She told me my music was perfectly wonderful—taffy like that. I knowed what she was driving at. It wa'n't no time than she was asking about May.

"Your wife's a wonderful dancer!" she told me. "How your music does inspire her! It is the most inspiring music I ever heard!"

"My wife?" I looked at her. "Why, lady, that girl

wouldn't marry me. I'm jes' a fiddlin' shanty-boater. She's a stepper."

"Not married!" this woman exclaimed. "But—but—oh—yes! I've heard on the river—— I suppose she wouldn't —— How honourable of you to put it that way!"

She sniffed—at May! Course, I hadn't thought anything before. We were jes' two professional people. There wasn't any real violinist May could find, no real musician, so she'd put up with me. Lots of geniuses is thataway, putting up and getting along with what they have, not complaining or anything.

"Who's that woman you were talking to?" May asked me afterward.

"Why, I don't know—one of those uptown women——"

"Oh—was it?"

I knowed right away that May knew I'd blundered, saying something. I hadn't thought anything. Imagine me thinking anything about May! She was awful quiet, along. There was a tall, handsome man come to her, with flowers, saying it, as they tell around. I sure despised that up-the-banker. He wa'n't fitting for May. The bestest man in the world wasn't fit for her. He come to me once. He wanted to know if May wasn't my wife? I told him, the same as I would anybody, how it was. We were only professional people.

Those were mighty lonesome days for me. Seemed just like May an' me was being tore apart, stretching the aching strings of my heart. Course, I jes' knowed hit didn't matter to her. She was thinkin' about her dancing. She was busy having new clothes made and was studying the new life that was opening up to her.

"Lucien!" she told me one day, down on the boat. "Just think—the world wants us!"

"Us!" I laughed, but it hurt. "Hit's you!"

She gave me one of those quick, birdlike looks as though I was plumb ridiculous. I knowed I was, too, or she wouldn't be making fun of me, as if I was much more'n jes' somebody to mark time for her. She could dance to "Patting Juba," making it sound like the "River Voices" when old Joe Parmer plays hit.

I had some jobs fiddling at private houses; ten, twenty,

fifty dollars they'd pay me. They paid May five hundred dollars one night to dance at a business men's dinner, on the table. She came down to the boat crying mad. I don't know what happened. She scolded me, rearing right down on me.

"Don't you know what I want?" she told me. "Don't you see what they think? Oh, you poor idiot—have I *got* to say it?"

"Say what?" I asked; an' then she reared at me. She'd been awful patient with me, one time and another. I couldn't always he'p showin' her what I thought, even if it was insulting for me to love her. I just couldn't bring myse'f to ask her to marry me, account of when you do that to a girl she's always sorry for you, an' she promises to be your sister an' don't know you the next time you meet her.

If I asked her to marry me, course, she'd cut loose, prob'ly go uptown, an' all that'd be left for me would be to trip off down the river, with just her picture on my heart, a picture burned in deep, beautiful, but a scar as big as a Texas brand. I didn't feel like I could ever stand a hurt like that—the hurt of losing her, never seein' May again, not her dancing, nor her eyes brimming with laughter and sympathy—and her lips that smiled free for me, until she begun to dance, and we needn't to wonder if we'd have enough for breakfast the next morning to eat.

That woman I was telling about come down to the ferry in her automobile one day. May'd gone uptown, so she asked Jim Horseshoe to come up the bayou to bring me down. I come down, course, so she took me with her account of May not being there, she said, my music being good, if there wasn't anybody to dance but her.

She was an awful high-toned woman, an' you know she wanted to dance herself, trying the riveh music. So I played for her. Course, if you dance riveh music, you got to know the riveh—know the rocking of the boat in the eddies an' the swing of the current. But this Alice Haven was quite a stepper at that. She said my music just carried her right along. She danced bold, though, not the way May did. Course, she was a good flinger an' had a little kick to her that was graceful—but she didn't have to be professional. She was rich. And when she was tired, she come and laid her

head on my shoulder for a breathing spell. That kind of thing neveh made any man feel bad, course. But the way May acted when this Alice Haven brought me back in her car like a cabin boat!

"She's trying to break up our combination!" May said, talking more spiteful than I ever did get to hear her talk before.

I was s'prised. I'd been worrying my heart out, fearin' May'd see how no 'count I was to her, an' be shut of me like I was an old hat. When she talked thataway, letting on she feared we'd break up, my heart jes' grew so big it hurt, like it would burst. May didn't want to lose me! She was so mad at the thought, she lashed me with her tongue, stinging, biting, slighting, scolding words. But, shucks! Theh's no joy so sweet as the raw wounds a woman gives a man, account of her being jealous.

My law! May Gardner slashed and cut me! Don't yo' be'lieve she didn't scorch an' bruise me, an' I was down on my knees at her feet beggin' her mercy an' pity, but my soul rang to sweeter music in the scorn an' fire of her anger than eveh hit had echoed before. May Gardner jealous of me! May Gardner tearin' to pieces the good looks an' reputation of that up-the-bank Alice Haven—account of me!

"That woman dancin' to my music!" May scorched me, her face twisting an' her eyes squinting mad. "You fiddlin' for *her* to dance! That woman!"

I expect some men is so sure an' pop'lar that it don't mean nothin' to them when a woman's jealous on their account. Prob'ly up-the-bankers, swell folks, neveh know what hit is to find out a lady likes them so much she hates anybody else that's friendly.

I come down on the riveh account of a woman's laugh at my playing music, the best I could do, for her—when she'd been listening to jingling dollars in another man's pocket. Funny, ain't it, how things work out? I've been making more money in a day 'n that feller she jilted me for has eveh made in a week.

I was at May's feet. I kissed those pretty silk stockings, between the straps of her slippers. I cried, tears coming down my cheeks—but not on account of being sorry, no, indeed! I was happy! I was so blamed happy I dassen't

to show her my face, for fear I would betray the joy I was enduring.

An' I took her hands in mine. I kissed them, grateful as a dog for the friendly pat of his mistress. I'd neveh in God's world deserve any happiness that dancing girl had given me; the rewards of heaven couldn't have tempted me away from what it dawned on me was coming to be mine—account of her being jealous of that up-the-bank woman!

Course, d'rectly I was standing up. I was standing in the cabin of my shanty-boat, on the floor where Steppin' May'd been practising. An' she was right theh, with my arms around her, an' her face turned up to me.

"May," I said, "yo' don't mean—yo' don't want me to ask yo' to marry yo', do you?"

"Don't I?" she asked, awful sarcastic. "What do I want, then?"

I couldn't believe it, even then, an' her in my arms, all limp—to have for my own, to kiss those lips, to claim those eyes! Lawse! Lawse! Fiddling Luce come to this down old Mississip'!

Hit wan't jes' professional people. Hit warn't jes' me fiddlin' for her practice steppin', come the time when she'd have somebody that'd be able to play.

Hit were me loving that lovely woman, with her arms around my neck, and my lips worshipping temple lips, looking into the gem-light windows of her soul. Yes, suh! How come hit that woman let on she loved me? How could she—that woman, like a statue alive?

I married her. We cut loose from Mendova, trippin' down. When night come, I couldn't believe hit were so, that she wouldn't, an' I wouldn't either, go out into that skiff alongside, to sleep under the tarpaulin—but this was our cabin, our room, and she'd sit on my lap. Sho! Sho!

Yes, suh! Lots drap down old Mississip', an' the farther down they go, the more miserable they are. They'd better quit, 'fore they roll out at the Passes. But some—some that hear the music, some that see the flash and spread of the colours, some that listen to the birds and feel the soothing in the sting of the north wind, an' smell the fragrance of the blossoms in the dank of the swamp brakes—they'd sure better keep on trippin' down; yes, indeedy!

I tell yo', if a man can keep step to the song old Mississipp' sings, he better not break with it. He'll march into the halls of plumb comfort, if he marks the time, yes, suh. That's my experience. 'Tain't everybody's, but hit's mine. An' May, she says it's her experience, too. We've been far together, New York an' the Coast—— Sho! No matter if we's busy—ev'ry wunst in a while we stop off on old Mississip', buy a shanty-boat an' trip down. That's what we're doing now. But we don't neveh stop to Mendova any more. May won't let me.

"I ain't going to have that woman—any other woman—steppin' to your music!"

Just like that, and then we both laugh.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN—AMERICANS?

By WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

From *Pictorial Review*

THEY live in the country of the old—old houses, old sands, old men. Already they dream, and this is their dream, that when they are gone the tides, which seem to eat deeper into the Cove each year, will just come on up one spring and carry what's left of Cape Cod down under the water of the Seven Seas that in its old youth it conquered, its work and its glory done. And that will be before long now, for there are only a few folks left.

You can count the families on one hand. There are the Whites and the Fullers in the Hollow, the Rogerses at the Bog, the Brewster brothers at the Cove. That's about all now in this tenuous, half-drowned, seven-mile wrist of the Cape. Of the Whites and Rogerses there are four generations, in the Fuller house three: the latter ends run pretty puttering, though, and pretty thin.

If it's a far cry from the Edward Fuller who came ashore to say his prayers, chase Indians, and leave his name on the Pilgrim Tablet over in Provincetown, down to Eddie Fuller, yawning and attending to his pimples behind the post-office boxes at the Center—if it's a far cry from those dreadless "subjects of the dread sovereign" down to the youthless White youths, flivver-rattling to their fevered merrymakings at Wellfleet or Eastham, their galvanic dead-frog dancing, their drug-store tipple, and their radio jazz—if there's a gap there, there's a gap almost as wide and quite as melancholy between these tag-ends of the stock and a generation still living under the roofs with them—Sam White and Benjie Fuller in the Hollow, Ember Rogers at the Bog, Andy and

Isaiah Brewster at the Cove—men who fetched Kennebec ice-cakes to Calcutta and brought new China tea up the Thames in the *Sea Glory* and the *A. J. Stowell* two weeks ahead of London's own East-Indiamen in the days that were days.

In those days the Cape bred women, too. Look at Molly, Andy Brewster's wife, that's dead and gone. Then look at the Molly Brewster of to-day. She keeps house for her great-grandfather Andy and his brother Isaiah at the Cove, and what house she keeps! Well, it's not the way the other Molly did it sixty years ago. Bread baked in Boston, beans baked in Chicago, cake in cardboard from goodness-knows-where! She hasn't the time, she says.

Hasn't the time! Those two old men fathom the sad, deep, literal truth of that. She hasn't the time. She came too late, the sands too nearly run. After her the deluge; so why take pains? What's the use of forethought, with nothing to come? What's the use of character, never to be handed down? What's the use even of appearances? Studying her secretly from beneath their watery lids, they comprehend. That is why, then, she speaks a language of strange, daring, slipshod words; why her gestures are all immoderate and her songs out of tune; why she goes about unabashed in skirts as short and lips as red as a California harlot in the days of gold. That is why she is never at home evenings, darning or quilting under the sitting-room lamp, but off as soon as ever the supper dishes are stacked, with a pat and a fling and a mouth of rebellion, flitting the devil alone knows where in the dark of the country of the old.

"Let us eat, drink, and be merry——" Poor girl!

She hasn't the time even to care about the company she keeps. This strikes deepest into the hearts of Andy and Isaiah. Their pride is bitter. To think of these two blond vikings of the republic who carried the Stars and Stripes around a wondering world, who came home to fetch good, honest Indies rum ashore under the dark of the Cove like the free men they were, and went up to the meeting-house in their Sabbath beavers to worship the God of Massachusetts as only free men may—to think of them having to sit, shackled to their rockers by the weight of their proud years,

and watch the remnant of their line and population going, without visibly caring, to the dogs!

They would have called him a dog in their time, or at least "one of them niggers of some sort."

He comes out of the deepening shadows. Whence he comes, in that narrow land where there are only the Rogerses and Brewsters, the Fullers and the Whites, who can say? Andy and Isaiah can't. When they try, their minds close up.

Their minds do that of late years. More and more easily. When, at the ice-cream feast of the Dorcases last autumn, the two old fellows undertook in mournful gaiety to twit the schoolma'am upon the dwindling of her flock, and when she looked puzzled (for all the world) and told them that, land alive! they weren't to worry, she had her hands full, and would have them a sight fuller, she guessed, before they got around to putting in the new primary room—when she said that, Isaiah looked at Andy and Andy at Isaiah, one winked and the other cackled, and their minds, like wary clam-shells, closed up tight. "Primary room!" They weren't to be taken in by jokes like that. They were too smart.

He comes out of the deepening shadows, his approach heralded, long before he is seen, by the sounding-boards of the hills that gather down to the Cove, the clank of a loose brake-beam, the whine of gritted springs, gaskets wheezing. A curious centaur, head and shoulders and busy arms of a man, body of an ungroomed half-ton truck; so from their rockers on the porch behind the mosquito-netting they always see him, Jimmy the Greek. So he careens to a halt under the antique, uneasy willows in the blue-brown shadow cast by Sheep Hill; so he snorts, backs, swerves, carricoles, pawing the sand, gambolling in the twilight of these Yankee gods; so he rears there, breathing heavily with his pitted cylinders, peering glassily with his one large rectangular eye at the house beyond the turf, the house native and noble, solid and broad and low, with a roof like another slope of the gray Pamet moors. So, unbudging from his hybrid shell, he calls through the dusk: "Molly to home?"

Neither Andy nor Isaiah answers. Rock, rock, rock, their chairs and their dry bones creaking, their eyes meeting, full of repugnance, rebellion, appeal. They'd have their tongues cut out before they'd speak.

No need. Molly has answered herself. "Yep, just a second I'll be with yu, Jim, old kid."

She passes out between the rockers, hatless, free of elbow, wanton of stocking, neither mother of to-morrow nor daughter of yesterday.

"Where you bound for, Molly?" Andy writhes. He feels degraded.

"Where you bound?" Isaiah writhes. He, too, had sworn never to ask again.

"Oh, nowheres. Up to the dance at Chatham, that's all. Oh, for the love, Jimmy, can that honking, will yu! I'm on my way! Now, Daddies, run, climb in your beds like good boys. Sound sleep, sweet dreams!"

Sleep! Dreams! The mockery!

Their rockers are still. Leaning forward, squeezing the chair-arms with their vein-corded fists, they follow the iron flight of the centaur, cast back in fainter and fainter reverberations from the folded moor-sides, careening farther away, deeper away in the mists of the falling night.

He's going up Graveyard Hill now. If only their legs could run as swiftly as their minds. He's abreast of the old Snow place now. Thrrrmmm! Whine and wheeze! An abominable whisper threading the valleys. It's louder for an instant, as though a door in the hills had opened. He's crossing the marsh at the Centre now, this what-is-he? This Greek. This what's-his-name? J. Krenk, General Trucking. Jimmy the Greek. And Molly Brewster!

Anger, reckless and helpless, sweeps them.

Let him take her. Let him take her back to his lemon-peddling, olive-stinking, two-for-a-nickel Levant ports. Then let her see!

Then let her think of those White women, the other Mollys, her mothers!

Memories submerge the two men; their tantrum passes and gives place to nostalgia; they turn cowards, feeling themselves abandoned, defeated at last. The mosquito-bar is a cage, oppressing their lungs and bringing to their skins a faint, chill sweat. Moved by a common impulse, they get up and rush out. They have forgotten their hats, and Isaiah's head is as bald as a porpoise. What matter? Their rheumatics! Their hearts! What odds!

Where are they going, hoisting their feet so industriously along the clam-shell metal of this road? Where and why?

"We might drop around and see Sam White a minute, the night's so fine."

"So we might. I hear tell he was ailin' a trifle yesterday."

Two shafts of light, streaming from nowhere, wheel across the dark. Two orbs, sudden and blinding, fetch up with a snort to eye the vivid old men.

"Here they are now," comes a voice out of the creature.

"Why," gasps Andy, "if 'tain't the White boys!" Isaiah, blinking into the headlights, lifts a reedy voice: "We was bound your way, boys."

"Well, Ma said we should stop by and tell you, and save you the trip. It'll be Friday at two, the fun'ral."

The monster squats there on its rubber haunches, purring, reading their stupid faces. After a little it says: "You'd heard about Gran'pa, hadn't you? Went last evenin', quiet, no pain. And it's Friday at two." Presently it gives them over for dumb ones, bounces around in the road and streams off up the vale, leaving their eyes full of stars.

"Sam!" says one.

"Sam!" says the other. That's all.

Perhaps it's the way it happened, the stage-effects; perhaps it's something long predestined in the calendar of their years. No matter, the night has turned a corner and become apocalyptic.

Sam White is gone.

In silence they plod back. They plod back toward the cage of the netting, the eighty-year prison of the dark house. Sleep. Dreams.

But, no-sir! Not by a dang sight, they won't. They bolt the road and flee it at right angles across the tricky footing of the poverty-grass.

"*They seek water, and die in the open.*" That's rats.

But why all this? They knew Sam had to go sooner or later and give over his much of room to the returning wilderness and the climbing tides. Just as they know that Benjie and Ember will have to give over theirs, and they themselves, and let the tired Cape go down. Didn't they know that?

They're silly, but you can't argue it. It's something in this night, something let loose, something that pursues and

climbs up their legs like a travesty of strength, another childhood. So they clamber for all they're worth, in silence, their mouths open, as if it were true that the valley behind was filling up with the flood.

They look back when they reach the crest of Sheep Hill, and from the height they see the country familiar to them, rod by rod of its folded moors, its dunes and winding marshes, spread of a sudden fantastic and pixy-peopled under this night. Will-o'-the-wisps and ghost-fires.

There's John Champion's house, under the shoulder of Finback, a mile to the east. John died a good twenty years ago, and his daughter's family moved to Iowa. Yet there looks to be a light in it, a goblin cheer. Dave Burch passed on in the 'nineties; his children live in Los Angeles; the homestead, hidden under the cottonwoods in the Flat, opens an eye in distant banshee mockery. And there again. As if there were people, populations! And there again. Like a lamp on Borneo Plain!

There's one element that never betrays, but always plays fair. If the land is playing tricks with your eyes, old fellows, turn them to the sea.

Across the water the sky toward Boston shows a late loom of dusk, doubled upside down in the mirroring plain. Not far offshore, across the mouth of the Cove, a fisherman sails, his dim masts erect in the meagre breeze. Farther distant, toward the lights on Provincetown shore, a monster lies at rest on the sea.

So the sea, too, is corruptible to-night, even the sea. It abides Leviathan. Leviathan blowing a leaden, lazy spout; prodigious creature, ink-black, and incandescent-striped.

"She come in weeth engine-trouble," says a voice.

There's another watcher on Sheep Hill. He arises from a beach-plum bush at their feet, headless, because he has his coat shawlwise over his head.

"I never seen her beefore, thees ship, and that's funny because my boy goes een her, and she's lak a city, he says. Fifty-nine t'ousand ton! What you know about that?"

What, indeed, do they know about that? Except that the night is trying to play them another trick. Painting that shadow on the shadows out there, enormous; as though a master and a mate of an incomparable *Sea Glory* were to

be taken in by a jest as thin as that, a ship enormous as eighty *Sea Glories* on one keel!

"I tell you," says the shade, "these Englishmann, these Germann, they got nootheng on us now. One day us Americans we weel be as beeg a shipping nation as they is on the sea; you watch."

It's too rare. Andy and Isaiah open their mouths to chuckle, and before they can chuckle, a hot, contemptuous anger has got in their throats instead.

"Who are *you?*" they cry, and "Where you from?" Those voices that rang, full-winded, absolute, over the decks of the white clippers of the years when the world rubbed its eyes. Echoes now.

Echoes, yes, but echoes still puissant. The headless Jack-in-the-box sounds fetched-aback and ill at ease.

"Wh-wh-who am I? Well, I guess you know me, Meester Brewster. You know Manuel Braganza. You seen me round plentee, I guess. Since five year I got thees old Champion place back here, crost from Jimmee the Greek. I guess you know *me*, all right."

"Nope."

"You don't know Manuel Brag—— Don't know Manny the Lisbon?"

"Never hear the name. Never!"

"You—you—never hear o' my boy Johnee?"

"Johnnie who?"

Silence. That has done for him. It has done for them, too; done wonders. Their feet are solid on their own hill again and they begin to tower. Men against bogies, men will win every time.

It's true. The spook hasn't a word. Presently he begins to fade before their eyes, a receding whisper of sand. Across the hilltop and down the slope the long, black, dismembered torso vanishes degree by degree into the dark above the invisible Cove.

Give these old fellows an inch and they'll take a mile. The impulse to pursue, to rout him seven-fold, to crow, to pile it on, is too strong. Nor is it altogether this that hauls them to the sandy precipice where he disappeared. Triumph has given sudden rein to memories; their feet are in old paths, their tongues wag.

"Remember that night the revenue-man come snoopin'?"

"Remember the skiff bottom-up on the beach with the three bar'ls of rum under it, and me under it with 'em and my legs caught out by the gun'l, full in view?"

"Rec'lect the brig hove to out there, 'bout where that fisherman lays now?"

"The *Abraham*, wa'n't it? And Ezra Small?"

They pause. Pause? Where are they? What in the name of Jehoshaphat are they doing here, old flies, clinging midway of the precipitous sand? This much is certain: if they don't catch their death one way they'll catch it another.

They pause. Hunkering down in little sand-slides, they gaze at the becalmed schooner. In the cobweb starlight it might truly be the *Abraham*, and Captain Ezra prowling the deck and chewing his whisker and wondering what's wrong with the Brewster boys ashore. They gaze at the pool of the inlet below them, and there the starlight, chasing the ripples, weaves silver stuff of dreams, mesmeric, fluent. The gods are young.

"Rec'lect that night, eh?"

"Remember Molly——"

Molly! A subconscious discord. A rift of syncopation, dilute, galvanic; a painted mouth, an empty head; a half-ton truck, a Greek.

No, though! By thunder, no! *Molly*, they're talking of. *Molly!*

She was the wife of one, the sister-in-law of the other. Years have almost outlawed that inequality. To each she comes back all comeliness, all docile bravery, all grace. A woman of those days.

"Remember Molly that night, Isaiah? You couldn't see her, though, and you stuck under the skiff; the way she come trippin' down from nowheres, fetch one look at your boots croppin' out like a hamstrung turtle, set down on the skiff, tidied her skirts out over, and set there gazing at the stars as soberlike as if she was in the habit of star-gazin' every night with a shotgun laid across her lap. Nor you couldn't see the way old Revenue Perkins eyed her and hesitated, scrawn out his neck and fetch to a halt."

"I heard him, though, Andy; promise you that. 'Pleasant evenin', Mis' Brewster!' 'Pleasant evenin', Mr. Perkins!'

'I'm aimin' to have a look innunder that skiff, if you don't mind, Mis' Brewster?' 'In which case, Mr. Perkins, you're aimin' to do something you ain't able; not so long's I'm settin' onto it.' 'In which case, Mis' Brewster, I shall have the law onto the lot of you——' 'In which case, Mr. Perkins, I'll have something a sight quicker actin' than the law onto *you*, sir.' (With that I hear the gun-butt easin' up along the garboard-strake.) 'Quit it, Molly Brewster!' says Perkins. 'Git, Eben Perkins,' says Molly, 'and git quick!'"

"And Revenue gat! I *guess* he gat!"

"Never hear the last of it, did he? Nor come snoopin' *this* way again, eh?"

"Feared o' meetin' up with Molly! Heh-heh!"

The gentlest, the abidingest of women! What homage could be more precious to the heroine of long ago than this cachination of old men, this mirth flung out in thready challenge to reconquering nothingness and the prowling powers of the dark?

The dark answers, coagulating in another shade at their feet, down-hill.

"What you doin' here, you guys?"

Their mouths dry and fall agape.

"Well, I v-v-vow!" bleats Isaiah, and Andy echoes him: "I vow!"

"Oh," breathes the shade, "I know now. It's old Isaiah and old Andy."

"But who in—in —— are *you?*"

"Don't you rec'nize me? It's Tony Fuller from the Coast Guard. You know me."

"*Tony!*" They see their chance. "Tony *Fuller!*" The impostor is delivered into their hands. Their voices break high. "There wa'n't never a man—there's been Eds and Ezras, Johns and Jonathans—but never a man amongst the Fullers called by any such nigger name, such a lemon-peddlin' name, as 'Tony.' No-sir-ee!"

The haunt chuckles, rubbing his lips with a spectral sleeve.

"Try Farquiera then; that's my family's name when they come from the Azores. Or if you're bent on crackin' your jaws, try 'em on this guy Sob-lef-sky—Sub-lof-sky—whatever 'tis. He's down in the road there to the left, waitin'; so you get along now, quiet, and tell him I sent you, and he'll

leave you through. Skedaddle, my boys; clear out o' here!"

If there is one there are a dozen retorts, just at their scandalized lips; arrogant laughter, withering old quarter-deck oaths. Dumbly, though sending down a whispering lace of sand, like autumnal spiders, they flee as they are told, not knowing why. They get off the cliff, their own cliff, not knowing how; a lichenous ground is underfoot, then a streak half clay, then ruts. A wind, a slow draft redolent of clam and weed, bears them along; an air familiar as the years of their youth, turned secret and queer. It bears them into the mouth of a hollow floored with blackness and roofed with stars. Sergeant Belkar Soblievski of the State Police snaps on the headlight of his motor-cycle and examines them with his yellow cornucopia of flame.

"You're out late, my friends." Then, not meaning the light-blistered couple to stand there all night, he says in a kindlier tone: "Go right on, the way you were going, my fathers, and keep your mouths shut, and no harm done. Good-night."

It is some moments before he snaps off the snooping light. Behind Isaiah and Andy, across the wheel-track to the Eden of their ancestral Cove, the ray hangs horizontal, like a lazy angel's flaming sword.

Here come the willows out of the hill. There's a moon somewhere under the eastern ocean, and its foreglow, refracting from the zenith, describes with faint silver the slopes of the roof, the two fat chimneys, the fence.

So it's home they're coming, after all.

Their boots drag; soul and body they're beat, the pair of them, dead beat.

The house opens and swallows them. No need of a lamp; they can find their beds in the dark. Mind the table, Isaiah. Take care of that swayed door; it's got to be fixed, no two ways. Here's the chair for Andy, and here's the chair for Isaiah, to drape their coats and trousers over, their shirts and drawers.

There's nothing left but sleep, then. Sound sleep. Sweet dreams.

Isaiah, the youngster of the two, lies on his back, toes up, wide awake. Andy, across the room, lies toes up, too, count-

ing sheep. One sheep over the fence; two sheep over the fence; three sheep over the fence. There's a nigger-looking fellow herding them. Land! he's got no head. Manny the Lisbon! That's a dirty port, Lisbon. And he had the gall to say—this headless Portugee Eyetalian fly-by-night——

What's that? There! Again! Passing like spirit footfalls across the turf outside!

The hall clock is still—still these years—but Molly's alarm-clock sends in a tinny cheeping from the kitchen. Where can Molly be?

Five sheep over the fence; six sheep over the——

What's that? "Andy!"

"Yes, Isaiah?"

Isaiah slides out of bed, tiptoes across the chamber, creeps in beside his elder brother. Neither of them says anything. It's nearly seventy years since Isaiah did that. But neither of them speaks.

They're not used to lying awake. It's this night. This night of supernal license, weird air-quakes, invasions crepuscular and fleering of little peoples from beyond the pale.

Seven sheep over the fence——

"What's wrong, boy?"

"I hear a mosquito in the room, dang him, and I can't sleep."

"Pshaw, Isaiah, now you turn over and shut your eyes and——" Andy sits bolt up, a listener. "Hark!"

Thud! A fault in the atmosphere, small, echoless. A gunshot, unmistakable. Thud! Thud! Thud! An imponderable fusillade.

Is it ghosts, in this land of the dead? Memories? All inside the brain?

Andy tries Isaiah: "Isaiah, did you hear anything?"

The youngster lies there with the quilt tight over his chest. It's a terrible thing, when you've been equal to anything and everything, to find yourself suddenly like this. His voice comes as thin as eel-grass.

"Where's that girl?"

It's too much for Andy, and he joins in: "Why don't she ever come home? What's she thinkin' on, this hour of the night?"

"'Tain't decent, Andy. What'll folks say?"

"What does she care for that?"

"What does she care if she keeps us wakin' for her?"

"Who are *we*, anyhow? What do *we* 'mount to?"

"What does anything 'mount to these days; anything but cavortin' about with foreigners, dancin', huggin' maybe, carryin' on, forgettin' your religion, your elders, your upbringin'—anything to make the time go quick?"

"And devil take the hindmost!"

There's a cry, chambered in distance. The devil taking the hindmost, perhaps. The empty moors and dunes where men used to live give it out; one lone articulation, anger, terror, mortal pain, who can tell from the spent whisper creeping in through the Brewster blinds?

"A-n-d-y, I wish—I wish that girl was to home."

"I—I wish she was."

The shame of it, confessed at last, mutually, out loud! Isaiah Brewster, who in the name of the Great Republic stood up on his feet and told the port-bashaw of the Emperor of Siam to go to Jericho! Andy Brewster, who with his own hands put half his crew in irons at the height of the Seventy-one Typhoon! The two of them now, praying nothing but the sound of Molly's dance-shoes on the floor beyond the wall; the comfort of even Molly's doomsday youthfulness under the roof with them!

Prayers aren't half-ton trucks, though, for beggars to ride.

Or are they? Wait!

Isaiah is up now, sitting as bolt and gray as Andy.

Another mosquito? No. Hardly louder than a mosquito, to be sure, and oddly like the insect's silky whine—that whine of springs and beams and gaskets, all in one, a mile away.

"'Tis him!"

"'Tis! 'Tis!"

"He's to the marsh now—or—or no——"

"N-n-no—no—— Isaiah!"

"You mean it don't sound like 'twas on——"

"'*Tain't* on. 'Tain't on any road I know of, Isaiah. That's clear to the north'rd somewheres. Sounds to me——"

"Sounds to me like it was all adrift somewheres up Borneo Plain——"

Thud! The shadow of the phantom of a shot! That's gone.

So is the whine, like the whir of a night-hawk planing back into the night again.

"Isaiah," says Andy, "you lay down and go to sleep. This is foolishness."

Five minutes, up they knife again.

A step. A clandestine sole on the porch. A sneaking tread.

Andy wouldn't speak for a million dollars; neither would Isaiah.

"Molly!" they call in the same breath.

No answer. Only the scratch of a match, out the kitchen way.

"Molly Brewster!"

The match goes out. More footfalls. Odd footfalls. Odd chills.

Who? What?

The second match is at the very foot of their bed, a blinding nimbus. In the nimbus there are two eyes, a lean, green-brown face, a hat like an inverted flower-pot made of kinky wool.

"You gaht ahny rags, say?"

When Isaiah was mate in the Boston fruit-bark *Hope Wade* he used once a year to load figs at Smyrna. He used to sit in an armchair on the house within one spit of the rail and keep those natives going as only a Cape man could, with alternate volleys of truculence and wit. "If there's one thing I'd love to see before I die," he used to say, "it's one of you lazy heathen Turk-fellahs tryin' to earn a meal in the town of Pamet, Barnstable County, Mass. If there's one thing I'd love!"

It comes back to Isaiah, every fatal syllable. The white rims widen around his eyes. He begins to speak.

"You're that Turk——"

"Curse the Toork! He keeled my fahther, my mahther, my brahther!"

"No-sir, though, no-sir, all foolin', you're the one—the one folks c-c-calls the Turk—that comes by sellin' carpets. You are so!"

A frown withers the green-brown face.

"You gaht ahny rags, say? You gaht ahny rags?"

The match burns a finger and sails away in two red stars,

blown by an Asian oath. In reverse the business of footfalls reënacted, across the kitchen, across the porch.

The night has overreached itself. "Got any rags?" That's a joke.

There a glimmer of moon through the cracks in the blinds. In the wraith of light Andy lifts on an elbow and studies supine Isaiah. The youngster lies with his head cracked back, as though by a blow, his mouth open, the shape of a black egg, and his whisker thrust straight up in the air. He's not dead, though; he's asleep.

Andy lies back and summons all his resolution. Resolutely he envisions sheep, just such sheep as Dave Burch used to run on Borneo Plain, matted gray-brown bodies and slender legs snapping under them. Over the stone wall they go. One sheep over two sheep over; three sheep over; four—or was it five?- five—six sheep——

When he awakens it is with a gulp and a kick.

Who's that? By the bed there, towering in the new gray?

It's Isaiah. It's the youngster, getting his pants on.

"I can't stand it," says Isaiah, his teeth aclatter.

"What is it *now?*"

"I don't know. My godfrey, if I *knowed*, I—there! Hark to that!"

"That trompin' like?"

"Trompin', yes. Trompin', skitterin', skutterin' all about, whisperin', too, and groanin' into the bargain. There, now! Will y' hark?"

"In the wood-house. Or more like Molly's room. Mebby it's Molly."

"I want to know."

"Or cats."

"I want to know."

Andy fumbles his pale legs out of the quilt and into his trousers. They go in stocking-feet, carrying their boots. In the kitchen Andy pauses.

"Molly come home?"

"Never hear her."

"You been asleep, though."

"I ain't. Not one blessed wink, and that's true. No-sir, everything I seen, I seen. There's niggers and heathen and all manner of islanders and dagoes spiritin' about this night.

Andy, there was a Turk come into our room, and I seen him with my own two eyes. So I ain't been asleep."

"I'll look in her room, anyway, on the chance."

Holding his breath, he edges open Molly's door. His head disappears. It reappears, the cheeks collapsing with relief.

"By glory, she *be*. Here all this time, to bed, asleep. Us fools!"

Side by side, holding the door open, they gaze into the chamber, cave-lit with the seepage of dawn, perfumed with violet water, tar soap, carnation powder, fibre-silk stockings, and all the faint, mingled emanations from frocks and underthings—the rectangular gray whiteness of the bed—the dark spot of a head averted on the pillow.

"Don't wake 'er."

"No; easy's the word; take care."

The old fools!

"Molly!" breathes Andy, just once. Just to try.

The head on the pillow flops over. The heads in the door thrust out.

Black eyes study them from the pillow, hypnotized.

Jimmy the Greek!

If he is hypnotized, what are they?

It was in this room, in that bed, that Molly White Brewster died, on Cleveland's election day. It was through that window her soul went to heaven.

They can do nothing but stare; stare at the bureau, holy of holies, untidy, intimate; a pot of cold-cream, a ribbon, a note, a garter, a kitten of combings, a man's plaid cap; stare at the bed, the pillow, the solitary presence there, obscurely begotten, horde-born, Mediterranean.

They open their mouths to roar like lions; in the hush they bleat.

"Where's M-M-Molly?"

He holds them with black-and-white eyes; he has lost his tongue.

"Wh-wh-wh-where's *Molly?*"

It's Molly that answers, Molly's feet askip on the porch behind them, the wind of her coming across the kitchen, the fling of her arms brushing them aside like wraiths.

Worse than wraiths! Of a sudden something beyond accounting happens. In Molly's bedroom they've always kept

the old paper, spotty and faded as it is; funny old paper, peopled by Venetian boatmen and early Victorian trees. And now between two breaths Andy and Isaiah are pictures with the boatmen and memories with the trees. It is as though, still visible, no one saw them; as though reality had abandoned them and gone out into the middle of the room.

Molly is real; they're not. Tag-end of a race and a tradition, her docked hair tousled, her shoes streaked with mud from another county, hem of a torn petticoat at the trail, she's flesh alive; a tradition and a race beginning.

She's on the bed's edge, hip and elbow, one wild hand in Jimmy Krenk's black curls, combwise, questioning, and her breath against his cheek.

"Y'all right, kid? Tell me quicker'n quick: y'all right?"

"Are *you* all right, Moll; you tell *me?*"

"You should worry about me! D'I look sick?"

"But, Moll——"

"Shush, kid, I know. I look like a home-made hang-over. I know I do, but you got to consider a hundred 'n' thirty miles in that bus of yours is no tea-dansant for a fair young thing, is it now? 'Specially the last fifteen of 'em on a rim. Cheer up; I'll look good when I get a shot of coffee in me. And don't worry about the stuff; I got it all safe and dark to you-know-who, you-know-where, thirty-one cases, check, and you couldn't have made it snappier yourself, you poor angel, and that's that. And the bus is back in Costa's g'rage with the old plates on—and the clutch afloat—and that phony rear shoe gone to —— and that's that. And that motor-cycle egg was into Yarmouth Hospital at three, I just got word at the marsh, with his right arm out of commish. And that's that."

"Was it you, Moll? Was it you plugged the guy, same's Turkey says?"

"Well, if I didn't, there's been some awful mistake. I picked up your gun when you dropped it, and I was peeved. But say, don't get me talkin'——"

"Listen, Moll, tell me somethin'. Was it you carried me up here from the Cove, same's Turkey says?"

"Well, Turkey helped some—as quick as he——"

"Where was the other guys?"

"Busy, don't you forget. Who'd you s'pose got the cop

crowd trailed off down Truro way? Jazzy work for a while. But now, Jim, how's the bean?"

"Bean's bright."

It's the strangest sensation, being a Venetian boatman inked on moldy wall-paper, harkening to unintelligible tongues.

"And the leg?"

"Absitively perfect limb."

"Turkey get it bandaged right? That petticoat of mine I slammed on——"

"Coold not find ahny rahgs."

Reality spreads with the growing dawn. It's the Armenian himself, down on his hams on the carpet beyond the bed.

"No rags? Turkey, you're a bird! But listen—my——! You mean to say that plugged leg is still—— Oh, you poor lamb! Now, listen, Jim; I'll go as easy as easy, but I got to give it a look."

The painted boatmen close their painted eyes. Their painted ears they can not close. Earth swarms. Their painted minds they can not get quite shut. Murmurs. Fragments. The land of the old, the turncoat, teems with the pitiless voices of the young. Rumours creep in through the windows.

"Doc and the priest ought to be coming——"

"——No, Gabriel phoned the priest he needn't come. Jim's all right."

"He'll be all right, that is, if we can keep him doggo for a spell——"

"——But what they'll say up-Cape when he don't show up at short-stop for the Legion in the Barnstable game next Sunday——"

"Oh, we can bull through it somehow—— Hey, what's that?"

Another kind of a murmur; a high, faint throbbing in the air.

"Molly! Inside there! Here comes Doc Bader from Provincetown. I guess it's him, anyway; it sounds like Gaspa's sea-plane. I'll slide up to the pond and show him the way."

Still another note, within the room, this one, half crooning:

"Good kid, did I hurt? Oh, good kid, I tried to be so gentle——"

"Gentle, Moll? Don't talk. You're the gentlest ever; and you're more'n the gentlest; you're the beautifulest, and you're more'n the beautifulest; you're the straightest, bravest——"

"Bravest! Quit kiddin', you Greek idiot. I been frightened sober; I'm still scared weak. Take hold of me and hang onto me tight, tight."

"I got yu, tight. All there is, though, I hate to be a bother here."

"Bother! That's a good line. It's my house, isn't it, Jimmy dearie? And seeing we're going to get married Friday, where's the diff?"

(Friday at two!)

The Venetian boatmen end their fading by fading quite away, out of the bedroom, out of the house.

It's a fog-dawn, the light from the sun-tipped hills coming down at every angle through the pearly smother. It's as if the night, in place of ending, had just bleached out. Albino darkness. White shades. The veil is troubled by them, half-glimpsed and gone; white shades of youth, black-eyed and swarthy, sallow and gray-eyed.

Once more Andy and Isaiah flee the canopy of the willows and puff up Sheep Hill. The mist dilutes; at the height they find the sun and air. And the sea, Leviathan gone. The honest sea.

They flop on a timber and gaze at it. By and by Isaiah points a finger at the wedge of the Cove, still in shadow below them.

"By cricky, she goes fast these days, Andy." He is resolved to see it, and he sees it; the marsh growing an estuary, the estuary a strait, a worm of blue salt water eating ever and ever more hungrily into the entrails of the dead Cape. "By cricky, 'twon't be many years till you can sail a vessel straight through the Hollow to the back side."

"Where do you get that stuff?" inquires a voice from behind the brothers. They won't have it. They won't hear.

"'Twa'n't so many years ago," says Andy in resolute musing, "there was beach-plums growin' out there where them breakers are now."

"The —— there was!" A shadow falls across them, and out over their heads, blue and amber, floats the cloud of a cigarette. It's Frankie Silvado, the surfman from Pamet Station, and he has a purple moustache and dark, live, ardent eyes. He might have yellow eyes and green whiskers for all Andy and Isaiah: they won't see him and they don't see him.

Andy clears an indomitable throat: "Accordin' to my calc'lations, Isaiah, the way she's sinkin' now——"

"That's a lovely pipe, that is," persists the tactless shade. "I been patrollin' this shore ten years and more, and I used to have to walk on the cliff because the tide was all over where them grass-flats is now. You old geezers ain't up with the times, or you'd know all this land is makin' all the while. There was a professor lectured to Provincetown last summer, and he says, like's not, it'll be all dry ground from here clean to Plymouth shore one day, with woods, like's not, and farms, and cities——"

Cities! The brothers are betrayed. From one to the other passes a sage and soundless guffaw.

"Though," adds Silvado, "I don't know what kind o' people there'll be to live in 'em, the way things are goin' now with this Cape crowd, gettin' to be smugglers—runnin' in liquor off these West Indie vessels for all they're worth —women as bad as the men, too, accordin' to what Tony Fuller says he seen last night. I tell you the truth, I don't know what this country of ourn is comin' to."

By and by Andy turns an eye on Isaiah, and once more, with dogmatic patience, clears his throat.

"As I was sayin'—the way she's sinkin' now—and the way they're droppin' off—Sam yesterday—like's not you or me to-morrow—'twon't be so long now before there won't be any left hereabouts."

"Any what?"

Curse and double curse that Ginny! Like drops of water on the skull it grows suddenly too much.

"Any folks!" cried Isaiah.

"Any folks?"

Now they upend on their reedy legs and face him and lash out at him.

"Any—any—*Americans!*"

In the white pouring of the sunshine, as they watch greed-

ily the effect of that brutal blow, the red mottles go out of their cheeks. Now, at last, they are terrified. This fellow doesn't even know what they're driving at.

"What do you mean?" he puzzles. "What do you mean —*Americans?*"

ONE USES THE HANDKERCHIEF

By ELINORE COWAN STONE

From *Woman's Home Companion*

A PASSIONATE sneeze rent the studious calm of the Third Grade room. Before its echoes had died away, the Third Grade, Mexican, as one man, had focused a shocked, incredulous gaze upon the author of the disturbance—a pale, shrinking boy with eager eyes peering nearsightedly from beneath an unkempt shock of dull black hair.

"Ticher," shrilled several scandalized voices, as the startled Miss Lipscomb looked up, "Ticher, eet iss that Raphael who sneezes—that Raphael Arcienega."

"Right into the air he sneezes, Ticher," vociferated Anita Perez, indignantly, "that air that we mus' breathe—*nosotros*."

"And sooch wet sneezes," objected Emilia Villa.

"He doss not even cover weeth the hand the face," cut in Concha Florida. "I think he iss veree bad boys. Now shall we all mebbie be seek."

"*Quien sabe?* Perhaps even we shall die," supplemented Hortensia Valdes, her voice rising in a hysterical quaver.

It was as if the Third Grade already felt itself in the throes of a deadly epidemic. Anita Perez shivered and sneezed virtuously into a dainty lace-edged fragment of muslin. Since handkerchiefs had become *à la moda* in the Third Grade, Anita's had always been of the daintiest and, naturally, the most often on display. Manuelo Habanera and Pedro Gonzalos hastily drew from their pockets generous squares of cotton of dubious cleanliness, into which they coughed sepulchrally and long, turning reproachful eyes upon the author of the contaminating sneeze.

With head deprecatingly on one side the object of this general disapproval peered dubiously about the room. What was it all about? He had but sneezed, as everyone must do in the course of nature. Why, then, this public inquisition? Appealingly he looked at the kind lady at the desk.

"Children, stop it!" commanded Miss Lipscomb, briskly. "Raphael has just started to school. Perhaps no one has ever told him that one uses the handkerchief when he coughs or sneezes. I am sure that if we explain kindly to him why it is necessary to do so, he will try to remember after this. Who would like to tell him about it?"

"Ramon, Ticher," chorused the Third Grade. "Let heem tell. She can espick so good the English."

"Well, Ramon," acquiesced Miss Lipscomb, smiling. "Would you like to tell Raphael something about what we are all trying to do here as good Americans?"

Thus gratifyingly entreated, the chosen spokesman arose, adjusted his dashing red neckerchief, and faced his audience, graciously, yet with authority, as one born to dispense information.

Raphael had never heard of inferiority complexes and the perils of yielding to them; therefore he watched the debonair Ramon with all his wistful, self-deprecatory soul in his eyes. To be like this—so elegant, so careless, so sure of one's self!

"Here we try be the good American, Ticher," began Ramon, easily. "To be the good American," he explained, "one doss not fight weeth the knife or throw the stone or shoot the crap in the yard off the school."

Ticher made a mental note that it might be well to find out where a good American—like Ramon, for instance—did "shoot the crap."

"To be the good American, one doss not tell the lie." Ramon thoughtfully cocked a bright black eye at the top of the blackboard. "Eet iss not to be the good American," he offered innocently in enlargement of his text, "when Conchita poot into hees desk my new pencil and tells that she doss not see it."

"Ticher, no, ma'am! Eet iss not the pencil of Ramon," shrieked Concha Florida. "In my desk iss onlee——"

"*No importa* (it is no matter)," shrugged Ramon with

lordly tolerance. "That Concha, she eats hees pencils. I do not lig eaten pencils. I can buy awthers."

What magnificence! thought Raphael. One would do well to watch this dashing person and learn from him, when one obviously had so much to learn to be like the others and to please the pretty lady at the desk, who smiled at one so gently.

Now the lady spoke rather shortly.

"Go on, Ramon," she commanded. "What has all this to do with sneezing?"

"To be the good American," went on Ramon, "one keeps clean the body and the clothes. One breathes by hees nose weeth the window open, always the fresh air. To breathe the bad air iss lig to drink the dirty water. Eet iss full off thoss bug that call heemself 'my-my-my-cubs.' No, no, Ticher. Eet iss not so that they call heemself. Eet iss——"

"Microbes," suggested Miss Lipscomb, and put her handkerchief to her face as if she, too, were about to sneeze.

"Ticher, yess, ma'am. Eet iss heem that mag us seek. And to cough and sneeze weethout to cover the mouth," Ramon's voice dropped impressively a minor third, "iss to fill weeth thoss my-my-weeth thoss dirty bug the clean air." The lecturer's tense face and dramatically waving hands suggested an atmosphere swarming with loathsome, slimy monsters.

At his suggestive pantomime the wide-eyed Raphael cringed in his corner, shuddering at thought of the unknown horrors he had unwittingly loosed upon his hapless schoolmates.

"They get inside off us," went on Ramon with unmistakable gusto, "and eat on us, and they——"

"That will do, Ramon." Ticher cut the discourse short, startled by the shrinking horror in the eyes Raphael turned upon her. "Now give Raphael one of those pieces of clean cloth from the closet. I am sure that he will never sneeze without covering his face again."

Indeed Raphael would not. As if in anticipation of some cataclysmic attack of hay fever, he thereafter hoarded in his bulging pockets clean rags of all sizes and shapes, and kept his nose chastely buried in one of them much of the time, coming up only when air was necessary for the efficient per-

formance of his scholastic duties. It was not enough for Raphael that crimes against the public safety should be rebuked after their commission. He fervently believed in the traditional ounce of prevention.

"Ticher," he would burst out in a frantic stage whisper, suddenly starting from his seat to point a rigid forefinger, "Ticher, I thing Jesus is going to sneeze. Pleass you espick heem queeck cover the nose."

His enthusiasm eventually won for him his appointment as "monitor of the handkerchiefs," in which capacity he dispensed from the store in the cupboard clean cloths to those members of the Third Grade who failed to equip themselves for emergencies. The performance of this duty was a holy rite to Raphael; for did it not mean that he, in his humble way, was, like the brilliant Ramon, learning to be "the good American"?

This appointment was Raphael's one triumph, for he was not very versatile, hopelessly lacking, indeed, in those graceful accomplishments whereby Ramon held enslaved his little public. The only time Raphael had attempted to join his class in song, those directly about him had become immediately voiceless with wonder and delight. Emilia Villa, when questioned by Ticher as to why she did not sing, had explained all too frankly, "But, Ticher, how can I e-sink when that Raphael e-sinks? That noiss she mags—eet iss too awful!" And Raphael had seen Manuelo Habanera executing with his hands at his ears a peculiar fan-like movement whose suggestion was unmistakable.

About a month after Raphael entered school Ticher told the class about the proposed Americanization exercises, to be held here in their own schoolroom. There were to be songs and speeches, and there would be people there, she told the Third Grade, many people, to see and hear them. And—ultimate thrill—there would be a prize, offered by the Big Boss of the mining company that owned the town, for the pupil who had proved himself most truly American.

During the discussion of the programme, Ramon scored very neatly by a humorous suggestion that Raphael be allowed to sing.

But Miss Lipscomb had come to Raphael's rescue with a lovely smile.

"No, indeed, Ramon," she said. "I have something much nicer than singing for Raphael to do."

The inference was that singing was something that any one could do, that Raphael's talents were not to be wasted on mere singing.

When the "something nicer" was explained to Raphael, he was dazzled by the importance of the rôle for which he was cast.

The "piece" in which Raphael was to appear was to be the third number of the entertainment. Eleven children were to recite in chaste and lofty verse the merits of hygienic and wholesome living. Each individual verse was a separate unit with a theme of its own, and the initial of each theme was one of the letters that spell "Health First." It was to be Raphael's part to bring forth at their appointed times these letters, cut from cardboard and gayly coloured, and to assemble them on their elevated standards behind the group who recited. When he thought of the tremendous responsibility this involved, his hands and feet became cold and his breath short with apprehension.

The day of the exercises dawned inauspiciously with a raw desert wind racing across the mesa, bearing before it a screen of sand, which it hurled at the rattling schoolroom windows. Such a wind portended inevitably, as Raphael—monitor of the handkerchiefs—had come to know, a day of much coughing and sneezing, for your Mexican child is a delicate plant shivering pitifully from the least draft. Raphael thought that he must ask Ticher if there were plenty of nice clean rags in stock.

He forgot to do this, however, in the excitement of the first few minutes in the delightful holiday atmosphere that had invaded the schoolroom.

Even Ticher seemed different as she distributed small flags that the children were to wear. She had on a dress of blue silk, the colour of her eyes, with a soft lace collar; her cheeks were flushed and her eyes large and brilliant.

Raphael wanted very much to make her proud of him to-day, to show that he was "the good American." He wanted to tell her so.

But all the other good Americans had things to tell her, too. Hysterically they demanded her attention. About her

bobbed many ribbon bows of extravagant size and brightness, poised like magic butterflies upon dark locks ordinarily restrained only by wrapping cord or good sensible shoestring.

On the outskirts of the group hovered the boys, whose concessions to the occasion took the less exotic form of astoningly clean shirts and of neckties borrowed from fathers or elder brothers—all except the exquisite Ramon. Ramon outcarmined in his splendour the proverbial little red wagon, elegant from head to foot with newly barbered locks, white shirt, gay striped tie of orange and red, and new shoes—shiny new shoes, of a soul-satisfying squeakiness which necessitated many bustling trips to and fro across the room.

Raphael ruefully compared them with his own unpretentious footwear, a somewhat worn pair of buttoned boots which yawned obtrusively where several buttons were missing. The tips turned up about two inches from the ends where his toes stopped. It was impossible to bustle importantly in boots like these; indeed, they were only too likely even at a moderate pace to trip one whose movements were uncertain at best.

Raphael looked often for assurance down at his shirt. It was not new, not new enough to make him feel vulgarly overdressed, and it was much too large for him; but the pattern still showed in a pleasing red polka dot, and it was refreshingly clean. He rubbed his hand fondly over its smooth, starched surface.

Suddenly the monitor of the handkerchiefs was recalled to his duties by the sound of a stentorian sneeze. Peering anxiously about for the offender, he saw Jesus Estradilla just throwing back her head, eyes closed, mouth open, for another ecstatic outburst. He was saved from the necessity for official interference by the fact that Jesus had already unpinned the safety pin that fastened her handkerchief to her waist and now held the bit of muslin dramatically poised for action. Raphael was relieved, for Jesus was always unpleasantly on the defensive against interferences with her personal liberties.

"You, Raphael Arcienega," she had once told him severely, "you wipe your own nose—and I wipe mine. Eh? *Bueno!*"

However, the incident reminded him of something. He really must confer with Ticher to learn whether the stock of clean rags in the closet would be adequate to any emergency.

The closet was still locked and Ticher had the key. Timidly he elbowed his way through the group of clamouring classmates about Miss Lipscomb's desk and plucked gently at her elbow.

"Ticher," he murmured, "iss in the closet lots off the rag for the nose? I thing thees day mooch sneezing and——"

"Ticher, when I espick 'There hanks the flag,' do I point weeth wheech hand?" Pedro Gonzalos had rudely pushed Raphael aside.

But Hortensia Valdes had also elbowed herself into the foreground.

"Please, Ticher," she complained, importantly, "please you tell Gilberto Villa not to mag wink the eye to me when I e-sink my song. Eet mag me feel veree fonny, and een my song iss nawthing fonny." Hortensia's plain face was tense with the anxiety of the true interpretive artist; her bony fingers were twisting and pulling at her lawn skirt.

"Don't do that, Hortensia; you'll spoil your pretty dress. No. Surely you must not wink at Hortensia, Gilberto," confirmed Miss Lipscomb. "Her song is not funny."

"But, Ticher, yess, ma'am," objected Gilberto, rakishly, "eet iss Hortensia that iss fonny. When she roll up the eye, so—and wave the arm, so—I thing she weel say next, 'Cock-a-doodle-doo.'"

In the laughter that drowned Hortensia's indignant outburst, Raphael again took heart to pluck Miss Lipscomb's elbow and murmur, "Ticher, ticher, iss in the cupboard lots off the rag for the nose? I thing thees day——"

"Ticher, pleass," Gilberto Villa had wriggled into the foreground, "pleass you tell Felipe not to heet so mooch the drum. I cannot hear myself e-sink when she do so. Can I e-sink eef I do not hear heemself?"

"Ticher," Raphael began patiently for the third time, thrusting himself daringly in front of the indignant Gilberto, "iss in the desk lots off the rag for the nose? Many already sneeze. I thing——"

"Say, you Raphael," threatened Gilberto, "eet iss I that espick now."

"Raphael iss afraid that she weel forget hees speech," tittered Concha Florida. "He has so veree mooch to say."

Before this unkind taunt Raphael shrank back, utterly abashed.

"Me, also, I am afraid," confessed Emilia Villa, breathlessly. "I am so mooch afraid that my estomach aches me."

Raphael was again stretching forth a timid hand when a sudden squawk of anguish from the corner of the room riveted Ticher's attention.

Anita Perez stood at bay, frantically protecting her gorgeous new white dress against the teasing, dirty paws of Felipe. Near by Manuelo clownishly repulsed an imaginary attack upon his own coveralls with mincing falsetto shrieks. As Miss Lipscomb rushed to Anita's rescue, there was a general cry of, "Ticher, ticher, the bell rinks. The bell rinks! Now weel they come—all thoss people. Oh, my!"

Miss Lipscomb gently loosened Raphael's clinging fingers and pushed him toward his seat.

"Go and sit down, Raphael," she said. "And don't worry about your part. You do it perfectly."

Fluttering with excitement the Third Grade sat down and viewed itself with fatuous approval.

While Miss Lipscomb was calling the roll, two strident sneezes sounded through the room. They came from Emilia Villa and Angela Robles. Raphael, watching with apprehensive eyes, saw that they produced no handkerchiefs. And Gilberto Villa was coughing openly, shamelessly, right into the atmosphere which must be breathed by the Third Grade and its guests. It was just what Raphael had dreaded. But that it should happen on this day of all others, to shame Miss Lipscomb and the Third Grade before an enlightened public who would know, of course, that the good American does not sneeze or cough without using the handkerchief! Well, he must do what he could to avert the scandal.

Brazenly he flourished his hand when the roll call was over.

"Ticher," he reported, firmly, "Angela, Emilia, and Gilberto—he cough and sneeze, and he have nawthing to cover the face. I must have rags."

"Oh, surely," said Ticher, and unlocked the cupboard door. Apprehensively Raphael stepped inside and raised his hand to the accustomed shelf. Then he knew the worst. Only one clean rag remained. With despair settling upon his spirit, he saw the first guests enter the room. He saw, too,

that as they did so, Gilberto coughed raucously and, as if by signal, the Third Grade burst into a medley of excited coughs. Frantically he tried to think—to plan. Ticher was too busy receiving the new arrivals to be bothered. And, after all, it was Raphael, monitor of the handkerchiefs, who had been criminally remiss in his vigilance. Well, he must think what to do.

Covetously he eyed the filmy white of Anita Perez's new frock. What beautiful handkerchiefs that would make! But Anita sat in the far corner of the room. Sober reflection convinced Raphael that, in any event, Anita was not the person to sacrifice her elegance—even to save the day for the Third Grade. But girls did wear white things—underneath, where they could never be missed.

In front of Raphael sat Emilia Villa. Raphael leaned forward and prodded Emilia's plump back with a determined forefinger. Emilia turned upon him coldly questioning eyes.

"You take off the clothes—the onderneath clothes," directed Raphael, ruthlessly.

Emilia stared at him in open-mouthed horror.

"The white clothes," insisted Raphael in a hoarse whisper. "Take heem off. To mag the rag for the nose. Many sneeze——"

Before his desperate look Emilia shrank to the edge of her seat in a panic. Her eyes and mouth opened to their widest extent. Obviously she was about to shriek for help. Terrified at the consequences of his rashness, Raphael cowered back into his corner. Eventually Emilia thought better of it; she did not scream. But it was evident that he could expect no coöperation from her. He must think of something else. If only he wore skirts. Then, suddenly, Raphael's eyes kindled. Raphael knew now what to do.

No one noticed the frightened little boy who stole quietly from his seat near the door and vanished into the hallway. No one saw him return five minutes later, except Miss Lipscomb, who looked slightly startled at first; then smiled comprehendingly as she noted that he was wearing his heavy coat.

"I think, Pedro," she smiled to the monitor of the register, "that you had better close a window and give us some more heat."

Glad of Pedro's important clatter, Raphael moved hurriedly about the room, and did not take his seat until the bundle of rags that he carried was exhausted.

Immediately, it seemed, the programme was under way. Ramon, all bland smiles and eloquent gestures, explained to the guests how the Third Grade "learn to be the good American," and sat down, dimpling under a thunderous applause. People whispered about him and smiled.

Meantime, Raphael, in his corner near the big register, had begun to grow uncomfortably warm. Pedro had been liberal in his construction of what Ticher meant by "some heat." The perspiration was running out from under Raphael's heavy hair and trickling down his face. He felt unpleasantly sticky under his coat—but he did not take it off.

When the fateful moment came at which he must rise and make his way to the front of the room, he was so utterly palsied with fear that all his conscious effort was directed to guiding his stumbling feet up the aisle. At one side of the open space used as a stage he took his place near the gayly coloured letters that it was his present duty to display.

The eleven speakers also took their places along the front of the stage with much crowding and surging of the line. Raphael gripped the letter "H" and waited. Anita touched the ruffles of her skirt, coughed delicately behind a lace-edged handkerchief, and opened her mouth to speak. But suddenly Miss Lipscomb, who had been looking strangely at Raphael, rose and stepped over to him.

"You must take off your coat, Raphael," she said.

Raphael desperately cleared his throat. The eyes he turned upon her were piteous as he murmured in his thin, high voice, "No, no! Cold, Ticher. Too cold."

"Nonsense, Raphael," she whispered. "You're dripping with perspiration; you'll be sick."

And, disregarding the frantic appeal in his upturned face, she firmly drew off his coat and threw it over her arm.

A gasp that was almost a shriek went up from the shocked Third Grade. For under that coat, above the belt line, was nothing but Raphael. Ticher hastily shrouded his shrinking nudity again in the coat and signalled peremptorily for the performance to go on.

What followed was to Raphael a waking nightmare. Sweat-

ing copiously at every pore, with eyes downcast and limbs trembling with mortification, he staggered back and forth, dragging into their places the gay letters that illuminated the text which the good Americans at the front of the stage were bravely expounding to a persistent accompaniment of titters and whispers.

Finally, amid riotous applause they took their seats. There was a special salvo for Raphael, and all eyes followed him. But he was not deceived. This was not the honest tribute paid to the true artist like Ramon. Raphael had spoiled the show and he knew it. He had shocked, with his nakedness, the delicate sensibilities of the Third Grade's gentle public. What was almost as bad, the carefully constructed legend at the back of the stage spelled not HEALTH FIRST but HEALF THIRST.

Back in his warm corner by the register, Raphael shed perspiration and tears, his heart sick with shame, his face buried in his arms.

Miss Lipscomb watched him pitifully as the exercises went on. She longed to comfort him; and, still more, she longed for a solution to the mystery. For she knew that Raphael had worn a shirt when he came to school that morning. In the midst of the ringing final chorus one of the ladies turned to her.

"I wish you would tell me—I have been wondering all afternoon," she whispered, "why so many of your children have handkerchiefs exactly alike. Do they buy them by the piece?"

Ticher sat up very straight and stared. For the first time she realized that this was true, and that there was something hauntingly familiar about the colour scheme of those handkerchiefs—a dull cream background, faintly flecked with red. Suddenly her face rippled into an understanding smile, so radiant that the Third Grade involuntarily beamed in response. Even Raphael, who had raised his shamed eyes for the first time, saw, and was so infinitely cheered that he straightened up and prepared to give his attention to the rest of the programme.

Even now the Big Boss from the mill was rising, an expression of mingled amusement and doubt on his smooth, fair face. But as he stepped forward, Ticher suddenly did a

strange thing. Half-rising from her chair, she plucked him by the sleeve, and, drawing him back into his seat, began to talk to him rapidly and eagerly.

Finally he stepped to the flag-draped table. From his vest pocket he took a small velvet case, which he opened and placed upon the desk at his side. The Third Grade drew a deep breath. Over the edge of the little box they caught the flash of gold. There were excited whispers among which Ramon's name was audible. Ramon, in the front row, tried to look unconscious and succeeded only in making his eyes blank and Indian-like, while his little chin quivered and his teeth chattered.

The Big Boss told them what an impressive occasion this had been, at which they beamed complacently; and what a remarkable teacher they had, at which they applauded uproariously; and how gratified he was to know that they were striving for such lofty ideals. And now it was his pleasant duty to bestow the medal which had been awarded to the pupil who had, throughout the year, shown himself most truly American. Would Ramon Sedillo step forward?

Ramon Sedillo did. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say that Ramon Sedillo swaggered forward, but we must remember that it is not every day that a small Mexican boy receives from the Big Boss a medal for true Americanism. When Ramon retired after the ceremony, rosy and smiling, he was followed by the happy applause of his proud classmates.

Then something not provided for in the programme happened. The Big Boss unfastened from his pocket a heavy gold watchfob on a rich black ribbon. As he placed this, also, on the table beside him, he winked solemnly at Ticher. For a moment he did not seem to know what to say. His face worked and became very red. The Third Grade watched in polite concern; Miss Lipscomb, in open alarm. Finally he began to talk.

Because of something unforeseen that had happened that afternoon, he told them, it had been decided to bestow another prize for—for—well, in short, for distinguished service in the cause of Americanism. All year, he reminded them, Miss Lipscomb had held before them the idea that true Americans, to avoid spreading disease germs among their innocent

companions, always, in coughing or sneezing, hold handkerchiefs before their faces. Now, doubtless they had observed that one member of the class had, throughout the performance that afternoon, worn a heavy coat, in spite of the fact that he must have been uncomfortably warm. Could they guess why?

Audible snickers indicated that this question was unfortunate. The Third Grade was quite sure that it knew why.

The speaker hurried on, a queer break in his voice. It was because, he said, that member of the class had noticed that on this great day, this day so important to the cause of Americanization, some members of the class had forgotten to bring their handkerchiefs, and had actually been coughing and sneezing without restraint.

The Third Grade squirmed guiltily. And what, the speaker wanted to know, had this good American done? In order that his classmates might cough, sneeze, and blow their noses with clear consciences, he had actually, to make handkerchiefs for them, sacrificed his own shirt. Here the Big Boss abruptly had recourse to his own handkerchief. Miss Lipscomb watched him nervously, until, still choking a little, he went on to the grand climax of his remarks.

It had been decided, therefore, to reward this good American for his conspicuous presence of mind and bravery. Would Raphael Arcienega please step forward?

But Raphael Arcienega was quite beyond that effort. It was only with Ticher's encouraging hand under his elbow that he managed to stumble to the front of the room amidst a dumfounded silence.

Not until the Big Boss was actually pinning the splendid jewel upon Raphael's coat did the full significance of the ceremony burst upon the Third Grade.

Then, as Raphael faced them, flushed and smiling unsteadily from the greatest happiness he had ever known, the dazzling truth was forced upon him.

Ramon Sedillo, the good American, was generously leading the applause.

PROGRESS

By HARRIET WELLES

From *Scribner's*

EACH of the epochal changes in Jem Brown's life coincided with a milestone on the road of progress. The first came on that day when, with the rest of the settlers in a southwestern hamlet, he went out to view the arrival of the United States Government's camel herd—advocated and sponsored by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis to overcome the difficulties in the transportation of war materials to isolated military posts on the Western plains.

Jem was so small that he did not scorn the support offered by his mother's draggled calico skirt, as he stumbled along beside her over the deeply rutted road to the edge of the town. As always, his mother paid no attention to his breathless endeavour to match her headlong speed. Meg Brown was generally alluded to by the men of the settlement with the lenient adjective of flighty; the women were not so tolerant.

Commented storekeeper Smith to his wife: "Quit pickin' on Meg, Sallie! She can't help it that she ain't bright!"

"She's bright enough to get along without doin' enough real work to keep her blood circulatin'," replied his wife, grimly—and spoke the truth. Mrs. Brown's methods of gaining a livelihood were as vague as her explanations concerning her former habitation, her widowed state, and Jem's paternity.

"She can't remember her own stories," Mrs. Smith had asserted more than once when her husband attempted to laugh away Meg Brown's erratic behaviour.

"Well, I reckon Jem's pa must a-been a pretty good sort, 'cause Jem had to take after *somebody*—an' he's too steady to favour his ma. Have you ever noticed how crazy that little kid is about mountains?"

Childless Mrs. Smith nodded and wistfully voiced an old wonderment: "How come such a triflin' woman to have such a good child?"

She wondered it again on this morning when, with the rest of the townsfolk, she awaited the arrival of the first camel train. Jem had sidled shyly over to her, slipping a small grimy hand into hers. His mother, lost in the enjoyment of vociferous argument concerning the camels' origin, had completely forgotten his existence.

"Bill Smith told me they come to America on a navy ship from foreign parts, an' they got a parcel o' black drivers with 'em!" Meg Brown quoted, shrilly. "Bill says as how they couldn't *never* build a railroad 'cross the country, 'count of the desert, an' it bein' too far between waterin' places—but camels don't need no water!"

"There ain't nuthin' livin' that don't need *some* water!" commented Mrs. Bill Smith with an emphasis entirely disproportionate to the subject under discussion.

Meg Brown instantly agreed with her adversary: "That's what *I* told Bill—but *you* know how he is!"

Ensued a silence, broken by someone's discovery of the first glimpse of the approaching camels, and as they came slowly nearer silence again descended. There was about the strange beasts nothing American—nothing to strike an answering chord of real or fancied resemblance. Only the brand of the United States upon their sides linked them up with any vestige of usualness—even the copper bells on the straps about their necks gave out an alien unfamiliar tinkle. . . . Jem Brown, observing four dark-skinned Arab drivers, strengthened his grasp upon the hand of his friend, the storekeeper's wife, as he watched the cameleers dismount.

Meg Brown boldly approached the blond Texan in charge: "Helloa! *Glad to see you!* . . . Say, what're they a-chewin'? . . . Ain't they proud-lookin'?" She smiled with ingratiating friendliness.

The man in charge recognized her type. "Sure, sister! They've been haughty an' set-up ever since we branded 'em!"

She welcomed his pleasantry with loud laughter. "Say, wasn't there no *new* camels where them came from? These look so kinda rough an' ragged—didn't they have no sleek ones?"

"You're smart, ain't you?" His tone was resentful. "These is the pick of the camel crop! That big feller there was a present to the United States from the King of Tunis—and kings don't give away no second-handed camels!"

Meg was properly impressed. "I never seen *none* before. I don't know a thing about 'em," she apologized.

"Your talk showed that! I guess you're like the Turk camel doctor in Tunis that tried to come along with the herd; he aimed to cure colds with cheese, an' swelled legs with tea an' gunpowder; if they didn't get better then, he tickled their noses with chameelyuns' tails," he commented, loftily, then unbent: "A sailor who came over on the ship with 'em did tell me that them heathens in Tunis worked off two camels that had the itch, on us."

"For the land's sake! . . . How can you tell the itchin' ones? They all look so kinda fretted an' mussed up!"

He stiffened again. "The partic'lar reason is, that neither of 'em was brought home; soon's they found out what was their complaint they sold 'em to a Turk butcher who's cust'-mers wasn't int'rested in peddygrees." He paused to glance down at the fascinated Jem. "Say, young feller, how'd you like for me to lift you up on one of the camels?" Then, as the little boy drew back, the camel man addressed the store-keeper's wife: "Your kid's shy, ma'am."

Meg Brown had no intention of relinquishing any advantage she might gain with the masterful stranger: "He ain't hers. He's mine!"

"Well, bein' shy, he sure don't favour *you!*" commented the Texan, and turned away to give some directions concerning the care of the camels for the night.

Having looked their fill, the people began to disperse. Meg Brown stayed on. The man in charge had attracted her vagrant interest; she hung about him laughing and talking. And since the youthful tinge of abundant health was in her colouring, the gleam of bronze in her heavy shining hair, her evident preference for the stranger's society found response.

Late that evening, half aroused from deep sleep, small Jem heard the voice of the man in charge raised in argument with his mother: "You say that you don't like it here, that the women is uppish with you—why d'you stay? . . . I always say: when you only have one life to live, have a good

time while you can! . . . What? . . . The boy? . . . If that's all you've got to bother you, you're in luck! . . . That woman who's husband keeps the store'll be *glad* to get Jem——" There followed a confused jumble of detached directions concerning an early departure. And when, shortly after dawn, Jem awakened, it was to find the cabin deserted, his mother gone; the fascinating stranger's lure of riding forth to new untroubled fields, upon a camel's back, had been too much for Meg Brown to resist.

What became of her, her son never learned. Wistfully he wondered why, if she had gone toward the mountains, she had not taken him along. But the settlement was not disturbed again by her.

. . . With the outbreak of the Civil War, the United States Government retired from the camel industry; the herds were scattered, strayed away. Quite recently one of the camels, bearing the old brand, was seen in a Mexican circus but otherwise—like Meg Brown—they have disappeared into oblivion—superseded milestones upon the highway of progress.

The next years were busy uneventful ones for Jem Brown. The man in charge of the camel train proved himself to be an expert in passing snap judgment; the storekeeper's wife took immediate and affectionate charge of the little boy—and never regretted it. Jem more than paid his way, carrying water in pails which increased in size with his own growth; running endless errands upon willing feet; planting and weeding Mrs. Smith's vegetable garden and helping her in the kitchen; working behind the counter of the store—but always, when he had a little time to himself, he went out beyond the edge of the town to stare, hungry-eyed, toward the mountains rimming the wide valley.

He was nineteen when an epidemic of typhoid carried off the Smiths within two days of each other and left him, without ties or funds, to face the future. His foster-father's partner urged him to stay on in the store, offered inducements, but Jem was not to be beguiled; restlessness had overtaken him. "It's gettin' crowded-like here; too many folks." Unconsciously he made a gesture toward the rainbow-tinted mountain peaks swinging up through the bright air under a

sky of ineffable blue. "Long's the Smiths was alive an' wanted me, I figgered I owed it to 'em to stay. But now they've went, you oughta see that I got to be a-movin' toward the hills!" explained Jem Brown, querulously.

What he sought—the means for sustaining life among the mountains—he did not immediately achieve; instead, for several years, he drifted: clerking in remote stores and trading posts, driving mail and stage coaches, working about the mines. All through the West during those strenuous days the talk and fever of gold waxed as steadily persistent as the lilt of wind through the pines. Fortunes were made and lost with an ease and frequency which bred conversational unconcern. Jem Brown, drifting with the ebb and flow, clerking behind counters at which prospectors bought their coffee and bacon, swinging his whip from the driver's seat of stage-coaches, listened carefully to the unceasing talk of lodes and strikes, of faults and contacts. Pocket hunting for small rich deposits of ore near the earth's surface was, he early learned, the most possible and profitable form of gold mining for an amateur without capital; thoughtfully he studied the rules for this endeavour until the day when, having achieved a small surplus, he bade farewell to the settlements and went on his own account toward the mountains.

His progress was a leisurely business of working down the ranges; in time he covered a surprisingly large area of wandering, became impervious to weather or hardship, lived almost entirely off the land. There were trout in abundance in all the deep pools, quail and doves everywhere for the snaring, edible plants and roots along all the water-courses. Sometimes, swinging into sight of the gleaming hedge of tin cans encircling a town, Jem Brown smelled the aroma of boiling coffee or sizzling bacon and succumbed to early memories by patronizing an eating-house or the store; but, as the years went by, he found walls and a roof increasingly unbearable, was happy only when he was among the wind-tilted cedars of the high country or panning out gravel in the rocky shallows of some mountain stream; inevitably, with so much looking, he made occasional finds which were always more than sufficient to supply his few needs. And as, with his primitive equipment, he washed down the loose floating gold against a sheepskin, Jem Brown did not know that the famed Golden

Fleece of the Argonauts was obtained through the same manipulations.

It was after one of these profitable finds that, journeying down toward the settlement with his ore, he fell in with other prospectors and heard the new talk of a railroad over which the first transcontinental train was soon to make its triumphal progress. The whole account was so amazing and incredible that Jem Brown determined to see it for himself; laboriously he notched off on a stick the number of days which would ensue before the great event.

Through some error in his checking system he arrived at the nearest railroad town a day late; the epoch-making train had passed, but reliable witnesses testified to having seen it, and led him out to look at the shining rails. Frowning, he pondered over the advisability of lingering about until the performance should be repeated, and decided in favour of it.

He was influenced in his decision by the presence of a small circus operating, for a week, in a cleared field at the town's edge, and by the discovery that among the chief exhibits was a frowsy camel, bearing upon its side the brand of the United States, counterbranded by a subsequent purchaser. But by no stretch of imagination could he connect the swarthy Mexican who rode the camel with the tall and blond young Texan of the cavalcade of his early memories; nor could his close observation of the circus folk off duty reveal any woman who night be his mother. This possibility being dismissed, he went conscientiously through the attractions offered, commencing with the tent performances and working slowly down to the last of the side-shows. Gravely he inspected the cherry-coloured horse, the laughing duck, the cow with four hind legs, the cat with three tails, the bearded lady; but through two afternoons it was the armless woman with the trained feet who completely fascinated him; breathlessly he watched her through the achievement of threading a needle and darning a sock, writing her name and the name of the town and State, fanning herself. Then, taking up a small saw, she commenced with some effort to demolish a plank. It was a most arduous procedure. Jem Brown, worriedly observing the exertion expended, forgot his shyness and offered advice:

"Ma'am, if you'd get that saw filed—*if you'd just only get that saw filed*——"

She paused in her undertaking to eye him grimly: "Young feller, I guess maybe you're right, because you're about the seventieth man that's told me that this week——" She sighed heavily. "What'd you think if I told you that I've been a-exhibitin' ever since early this mornin', and ain't had a bite to eat?"

He was immediately sympathetic. "Ain't that too bad! Could I bring you a hot bologna, ma'am?"

"I don't eat bolognas," answered the lady, austerely. "But I guess there wouldn't be no kick, if I was pressed to go to the eatin'-house before I drop in my tracks. Talk about *your* feet gettin' tired——"

He was divided between panic at the thought of escorting the celebrity through the crowd and utter horror over the possibility of having to watch her eat, or feeding her himself. Even as he hesitated, glancing frantically about in search of an avenue of escape, someone behind him spoke:

"Couldn't you go get somethin' an' bring it in here to her? I know the folks that run the eatin'-house an' they'll loan you the dishes to fetch it on, if I say so."

Jem Brown turned thankfully to face a young girl, small and very frail, with hollow eyes and a hectic colour.

"Maybe you'd be willin' to go with me?" he stammered.

She agreed. "I live at the eatin'-house—wait on table there. My name's Jenny—Jenny Burke——" She broke off in a paroxysm of violent coughing; when she had finished there was a bright stain on the handkerchief she held against her lips. "Ain't it. . . *awful* . . . to be sick? I'm so scared I can't hold my job—but it's gettin' to be more than I can do to lift the trays," she confided to him.

Again he forgot his shyness: "You oughtn't to be a-tryin' to lift trays. Where's your folks? Why don't someone look out for you?"

"I ain't got no folks. And Mis' Flynn at the eatin'-house is a widow woman with a big fam'ly of children. . . . Here it is!"

She quickly made the arrangements for the armless wonder's food, took the money to Mrs. Flynn, and returned with the message that she was to go with him and bring back the dishes. "We're short on plates, an' those show people is careless an' forgetful-like."

Together they returned toward the side-show. "I ain't met you before. I suppose you come to see the railroad train go past? Where do you live?" inquired Jenny Burke, politely.

Above the tray he carried Jem Brown indicated the distant peaks with a motion of his head: "In the mountains——"

"Do you now? . . . Way off there! . . . Ain't it lonely?"

"Not so lonely as the towns. An' the air's clear an' clean an' smells sweet of pine-trees. I'd die—if I had to live down here."

She sobered. "I'd like the smell of pines an' the clear air, too. I don't sleep nights for worryin' over what's to become of me when I can't work no more. Mis' Flynn can't feed her own fam'ly. . . . Say, what happens to girls that ain't got no money, nor folks, when they lose their jobs?" She stopped to wipe her eyes. But when they reached the side-show tent her gaiety had returned; briskly she approached the armless lady. "Gee! She ain't got halfway through that plank yet!" cried Jenny Burke, and interrupted herself with another spasm of dreadful coughing.

Jem Brown stayed in the town long enough to see a train go by upon the shining rails, then returned to the hills. But this time he did not go alone, the girl Jenny rode beside him on a pack burro. And this drastic change in his life had come about so simply. Even weary Mrs. Flynn's conscientious unwillingness to be rid of Jenny "unless it was all right" was overcome by Jem's readiness to be married by Father Collins.

"No'm, I ain't got no other wife anywhere. An' I ain't marryin' Jenny to get a wife. Once, when I was a kid, *I* got left in the lurch, an' some folks looked out for me. I'm handin' it on to her. She's too sick to work, an' I'm a-figurin' I can make her comfort'ble in one of them cabins the Guayule outfit abandoned when their lode petered out. . . . It's a real pretty place—high up, with a good spring near. I've got money enough to buy all the bacon an' coffee an' stuff she wants. . . . Ma'am? . . . Yes'm. . . . I don't mind gettin' married—even if it don't *mean* nothin' to me. . . . Ma'am? . . . Well, you see, I can make more money'n I can use, an' Jenny can't make enough to get on with. Seems like—if I expect to have luck—it's only square for me to go shares with her."

Mrs. Flynn's eyes were suspiciously bright. "If ev'ry one felt that way life'd be—not so hard," was her only comment.

And so, immediately after the ceremony, they departed toward the mountains. Besides the bride's slight weight the burro carried supplies, Jenny's small bundle of clothing, and her one treasure, a book.

"A dude prospector left it at the eatin'-house—said he didn't want it no more—so Mis' Flynn gave it to me." Jenny spelled out the title: "'Seven Lamps of Ar-chi-tec-ture.' Ain't that a queer name?"

He nodded. "Real queer. I ain't never owned a book. Couldn't make sense out of it if I had."

"I'll read it to you," she promised. "Now tell me more 'bout the mountains."

This was familiar ground. All day, while the trail mounted steadily upward, he told her of the beasts and birds and trees, of the mother bear and her lame cub in Hell Roaring Canyon, the bluejays at Cypress Falls. "You can count on their bein' there sure's you can count on its bein' spring!"

"The reason you ain't never felt lonely's because you've got such lots of friends!" said Jenny, wistfully.

"You'll like 'em, too. Animals ain't same's folks, they don't disappoint you."

He was right. During the few months that remained to her she knew the happiest days in all of her short and pinched existence. The little cabin was a marvel of spacious comfort to her, the plentiful food an epicurean indulgence. It was already too late, when Jem Brown found her, to do more than make the remainder of her life easier; and though each day she achieved less and less, her hold on living slipped gently from her slight grasp.

She kept her word about reading aloud. Winter evenings when, outside the cabin, the snow blurred and drifted and the trail disappeared in a white smudge, she conscientiously took up their one book. True, much of it was unintelligible to both reader and listener, but, like some appealing theme in a classic overture, they came upon intervals which captured their attention.

"Ain't it a nice book, Jem? It says that if you can't afford much-money things, you should buy *the best* of stuff that you *can* afford—an' that's real comfort'ble 'cause it works right

down the line. . . . What is it that that is? . . . *Sincerity!* . . . I like that! . . . Just like sayin', 'Jenny, you buy *good* calico 'stead of sleazy poplin!'"

Jem, lounging by the fireplace, proffered comment: "When you live outdoors you don't have to bother 'bout what's good or bad, it's all the best."

"I s'pose so—but ev'ry one ain't tough enough to stay out winter'n summer, the way you do. They have to come in to sleep at least."

"That's where they begin makin' theirselves lots of trouble! Read it again—where it tells about the houses folks build."

She opened the book. "'As regards domestic buildings, there must always be certain limitations to views of this kind in the power, as well as in the hearts of men, still I cannot but think it an evil sign of a people when their houses are built to last for one generation only.'"

He interrupted: "I'll bet the thin shacks down to the railroad town don't last no generation! They commence to sag 'fore they're finished!"

"That's true. I used to want to run outside the eatin'-house ev'ry time the wind blowed." She took up the book again. "Don't this sound like it was tellin' 'bout places we could put the name to?

"'And I look upon those pitiful concretions of lime and clay which spring up, in militant forwardness, out of the kneaded fields about our capital—upon those thin, tottering, foundationless shells of splintered wood and imitated stone—upon those gloomy rows of formalized minuteness, alike without difference and without fellowship, as solitary as similar—not merely with the careless disgust of an offended eye, not merely with sorrow for a desecrated landscape, but with a painful foreboding that the roots of our national greatness must be deeply cankered when they are thus loosely stuck into their native ground, that those comfortless and unhonoured dwellings are the signs of a great and spreading spirit of popular discontent, that they mark the time when every man's aim is to be in some more elevated sphere than his natural one, and every man's past life is his habitual scorn—'"

She stopped to cough, then glanced further down the page: "Here's some about you, Jem," she laughed; "'—the crowded tenements of a struggling and restless population differ only

from the tents of the Arab or the Gypsy by their less healthy openness to the air of heaven, and less happy choice of their spot of earth'—you're an Arab an' a Gypsy!" she teased.

"If likin' the air of heaven proves it, I am!"

Her expression became frightened and wistful: "Say, Jem, d'you know what I think heaven's a-goin' to be like? Well, there ain't a-goin' to be no towns there—just lots of mountains, an' pines an' space where folks can live the way *they* like, not the way someone else says! An' I wouldn't want no hard gold pavements an' streets to walk on—not if I could have a sunshiny trail instead—would you?"

Jem shook his head. "If there's such lots of good folks that it's crowded, I don't want to go there nohow." He thought it over. "Wherever there's plenty of folks, there's plenty of talk about progress. Know what progress is? . . . Well, it's inventin' somethin' to carry you over the country so fast that you can't see nothin' you're a-passin'. That's progress!"

"Like the railroad train!"

"Yes. I'm a-hopin' they'll be satisfied with that an' not go on a-inventin' any further."

"They can't never catch us—way up here!" she exulted.

He agreed to that. "We've stumped 'em!"

Jenny glanced down at the illustration of a tracery from the Campanile of Giotto at Florence. "Of course *all* the things them progressers have done ain't bad. Look at this! . . . Say, Jem, if ever you make a big strike let's us go an' see these places in the book." She hesitated. "An' if I ain't . . . around . . . just remember I would a-been if I could—an' you go anyhow. *Promise!*"

He laughed at such a preposterous idea, then, as she stubbornly insisted, indulgently agreed. "I'm perf'ctly safe in sayin' yes!"

"Remember, *you've promised.* I'll ha'nt you if you break your word!"

"*Sure!*" said Jem Brown.

Jenny died in the autumn; for weeks before the end Jem devoted his entire time to her, heartening her against the hours of panic which preceded the Great Adventure.

"I don't want to go off by myself among strangers, Jem!

All my life, 'til you came, I ain't never had no one that b'longed *to me!* I don't want to start all over again!"

After she was gone, and he had awkwardly smoothed over the small mound under the wind-tilted cypresses, he shouldered his pick and shovel, packed his gold pan, coffee-pot, bread-tin, and frying-pan, and wandered lonesomely forth to face the most arduous winter of his experience.

He had spent the money gained through his last find on small luxuries for Jenny. For the first time since he started upon a career of pocket hunting, his luck did not hold. Perhaps his wistful memories and preoccupations made him dull and careless, but several times during that long winter of roaring winds, deep drifts, and bitter, blue-white cold he staggered back to the cabin on Guayule more dead than alive from hunger and exhaustion. It came to him during those months—when his thoughts turned homesickly toward the little hut—that the first thing he would do when he made another strike would be to buy the Guayule; Jenny's grave and the small house should be his. But three springs of long rains had followed three difficult winters before his luck turned, and he was able to make a small initial payment against the claims held by the defunct and bankrupt Guayule Mining Company.

"Thinkin' of kyotein' into that hill, stranger?" inquired the clerk at the nearest court-house. "*Don't do it!* That d—— Guayule formation's volcanic: the lode breaks off sharp when you'd least expect it, an' commences again three miles farther up, ten miles farther down, or 'round the corner on the next mountain, that's how the comp'ny sunk all they took out'n more, too. I know all about it, an' I bought my knowledge through investin' the legacy my wife got from her gran'-pap in the Guayule just before it finally busted. Darned near busted my married life—we don't joke on *that* subject at my house to this day! . . . There's high-grade ore in the Guayule, but it's prob'ly somewhere where it'd cost billions to get it out!"

Jem denied any such ambition. "No kyotein' into a hill for me! Pocket huntin's better; keeps you outdoors."

The clerk agreed. "Wanderin's fun—if you haven't got a fam'ly," he said, and made out the documents.

And then, almost as if fate had awaited his possession of

the papers, Jem Brown, listlessly investigating an iron stain on the rock wall below the spring, came upon his first appreciable find; for several days he examined certain details of his discovery and stood at last scowling down at the mat of floating gold particles in his pan, or staring with narrowed eyes at the place from which he had taken it. Here was fortune knocking! What answer should he make?

Irrelevantly half-forgotten scraps of overheard conversations between gold-hungry prospectors loitering about the trading-posts came back to him: cities, *women*, liquor, shop-worn girls, grimy pleasures. These were the prizes purchasable when money was plentiful; easy gifts of easy gains; frowning, he thought it over. Some instinct, which had made him detest towns and crave the austerities of the mountains, drew fastidiously back from contemplation of the proposed orgy. Meg Brown had only been his *mother*.

A little breeze stirred the trees and moved the blue gentians at his feet and, like a message, Jenny's eyes looked up at him. "*Remember—you promised!*" came back her voice.

What had he promised? Oh, yes! To visit those palaces and cathedrals of which she had read to him. "But, Jenny, I was only a-jokin'! I wouldn't a-promised if I'd thought I'd ever a-found this!" he expostulated aloud.

The gentians fluttered their fringed edges in the breeze. Jem Brown groaned. "I won't be bullied! . . . But if I go back on my word I s'pose you'll be a-remindin' me of it from every foot of ground!"

The gentians were very still, very blue. "Oh, well, I'll go!" he said, resignedly.

So commenced a pathetic odyssey. Amazed clerks in railroad and steamship offices listened to his terse stipulations, glimpsed his abundant moneys—and quickly arranged his itinerary.

He made a strange figure against the Old World backgrounds; his baggy readymade clothes attracted curious glances in the hotels which he patronized, accepting without comment, paying without question, for the quarters assigned him; and all the time dumbly enduring the smothering restrictions of four walls and a ceiling, or wandering, confused and miserable, through the clamorous babel of the cities. Of the other frequenters of fashionable hostelries he was en-

tirely oblivious; the women belonged to no species with which he was cognizant; to him they were not human beings but strange exotics, unfitted for the storm and stress of out-of-doors.

Only with the guides who piloted him about the palaces and cathedrals did he exchange conversation, and from them, since he was generous with tips, he won especial attention and privileges. And though Angelo, Giotto, Correggio, and Giorgione were less than names to Jem Brown the sincerity of their achievements were as a bridge to carry him back home; a sculptured tracery of leaves reminded him of certain trees on the windy ridges above Guayule and brought a lump in his throat; details of clear colour in a world-famous window danced like the deep sparkle of sunlight in the pool at Cypress Falls—and blurred before his gaze; the starred ceiling of an Italian chapel was but a pale imitation of the night sky above Guayule; the gentle eyes of a painted madonna were not so gentian-blue as Jenny's. . . . In a moment of panic he wondered if she was safe beneath the cypresses—coyotes were such inquisitive marauders—then sternly dismissed the thought. Jenny had planned this visit, had wanted him to see the cathedrals; he must go back to her with the assurance of their beauty—and what was it that the book had named as indivisible from true beauty? . . . Sincerity? . . . Truth? . . . Power? . . . Ah, yes: *Sacrifice!*

But at dawn on the morning after his return to Guayule he awakened to see the first pure light filter down through the pine branches, to smell the incense of the balsams, and to hear the lilting ecstasy of a choir of meadow-larks; looking and listening, Jem Brown breathed a deep sigh of ineffable content. He was safe at last, *safe.* He never reopened the cache below the spring—from which he had taken out the ore which paid for his journey abroad; in his mind that gold was consecreated to cities, to confusion, *to progress.* Jem Brown had done what Jenny asked—but he had finished forever with progress.

Ruskin had said in Jenny's book: "Men tire as they finish"; and Jem Brown, stumbling up the slope of Guayule, was increasingly convinced of the truth and wisdom of this statement. He, who had thought himself immune and impervious

to any whim of wind or weather, had come to discover nature too boisterous for him; like some injured animal, seeking refuge, he was crawling home at last to the protection of a roof and four walls. True, forty years had passed since he came back from his one journey away from the mountains—but what were forty years? . . . And yet . . . during that final climb of his life, the unnoted years caught up with him; he was almost ready to compromise. Sharp pain stabbed and nagged at him as, with sobbing breath, he came out upon the wide clearing around the little cabin and glanced apprehensively up to see whether the circling buzzards had marked his plight.

In the doorway he stopped again and turned to look out across the wide valley—rimmed with range after range of rainbow-tinted peaks—noting, far away, dim blue smoke and visualizing the forlorn settlement. The gold-fever had run its course in that locality; veins of ore near the surface had been exhausted, leaving the working of deep-seated lodes to future necessity, capital, and scientific exploitation. Long since, nature had healed the ugly scars of man's brief desecration of her slopes and had forgotten him. Boom towns, sprung up mushroom-wise, flourishing through a hectic period of roaring prosperity, were as quickly deserted—except for a handful of derelicts too shiftless or too discouraged to move on. No one questioned their right to tenancy of any of the scores of abandoned houses whose broken roofs sagged above the staggering walls and crazy floors. Jem Brown, during his infrequent sojourns in the town, hurried through his buying and, averting his eyes from the settlement's sordid squalor, turned his face thankfully back toward the streets of the mountains. Of what was going on in the world beyond the barrier of the ranges he neither knew nor cared.

Because he had been so happily self-sufficient, time had dealt lightly with Jem Brown; long since, the spell of the high places had claimed him, eradicating all man-made periods; the calendar of his year knew no artificial division into months, was punctuated by events in the swinging march of the seasons: the first deep snows, the sight of God's flocks of mountain-sheep breasting the shining drifts, spells of bitter, blue-white cold when timber-wolves, grown bold through hunger, howled in the clearing; long rains, a spring thaw and

freshet, and the earliest arrival in the processional of the flowers; summer, with larks and blue-birds; and columbines a-sway to every breeze . . . until the time when the rosy mauve of fireweed ran up the slopes and the deer star hung low in the sky. And always—*always*—the faithful gentians had come back.

Remembering these, and all of nature's concern for flower, bird, and beast, Jem Brown wondered with sudden petulance why she was so unmindful of man. Now that his life was so nearly over he pondered—divided between elation and resentment—upon what had happened to man's invention, progress . . . that, for so long a period, his life's path had gone by unpunctuated by one of her devastating milestones. Progress would need to hurry if she held anything in wait for him now! "She's welcome to do her worst!" he muttered aloud.

Three days later he regretted his challenge; half-awakening from feverish slumber, he blinked incredulously at a strange, far-away sound. Remote at first, then drawing slowly nearer, there was about its rhythmic, pulsing steadiness something appalling, threatening, and sinister. Jem Brown could not connect it with anything familiar. . . . A drum, perhaps? . . . But what could a drum be doing, high up in the air? He listened more closely, craving reassurance. There was none . . . instead the steady beat was developing into a monstrous humming—into a dull roar . . . but not like the intermittent crashing with which, during a landslide the year of the big rains, the towering pines and the huge rocks had gone down the mountain. . . . .

Feverishly, he tossed and turned, trying to escape from the enveloping sound. Was this, perhaps, what was meant by *illness:* all sorts of breathless, groundless, vain imaginings *bred in houses?* Scornfully he derided himself for his cowardice in coming indoors. This noise at which he cowered was thunder—*thunder*, which had so often before volleyed and echoed in the mountains during fierce electrical storms. Defiantly he raised his head. The sound was still there, steady, regular, insistent—*and near!*

Dully he wondered if this was death—but why had he never been told what it would be like? Was death, then, a hideous, unending race through labyrinths of clamour and tumult? To him, who had spent his life in the stillness of

the mountains, what purgatory could equal that! Jem Brown cowered down, moaning . . . as the thunderous drumming came directly over the cabin, increased to a deafening roar, culminated in a series of shot-like explosions—and ceased. In the sudden uncanny quiet he could hear his own voice raised in a feeble whimper like a frightened child's. Of course it had been a dream, the feverish, half-consciousness of delirium . . . but how real for the moment, how hideously real. . . . "*What?*"

With terror the old man heard the sound of his first visitor, knocking; and saw the door swing back. . . .

A strange figure in leather clothes and a begoggled helmet stood in the opening, stared into the dim cabin, breathed an exclamation of relief: "I was afraid that this place was deserted—and I'm miles off my course! I've been trying for two hours to find a bare space to come down in; it was just by the merest chance that I saw this clearing—and none too good a landing field at that! Can you tell me where I am? What's the nearest town?" He stopped to look more closely at Jem Brown. "The light was so poor that I couldn't see you before! Are you sick? You look . . . *ghastly!*"

The old man could not answer.

The stranger stepped inside the cabin. "Isn't there something I could do for you? Water? Where can I get you a drink?"

Feebly Jem Brown pointed to the bucket, and indicated the direction of the spring. The young man returned with the brimming pail.

His decisive voice was clear: "If you can give me some idea of where I am, and the general direction, I think we'd better be on our way. I'll carry you out to the plane, and take you to a hospital. This is the *last* place for a sick man to be! Just now, by that spring, I saw a big bear and two cubs! You'd stand no chance—even if you were *able* to go for water!"

Jem Brown roused himself: "That's Mollie—I found her four-five years ago; guess her mother'd been killed, 'cause the wolves were yappin' round the poor little cuss. . . . She comes back an' hangs 'bout, every summer now, with *her* cubs. Mollie'd steal bacon'n bread . . . but she wouldn't touch me!"

"Maybe not. But anyhow you're too sick to be left here all by yourself."

"Did you . . . hear the roarin' . . . overhead, jus' 'fore you come in? What was it?"

"An airplane."

There was no gleam of understanding in the old man's eyes.

The aviator stared at him. "Can't you understand me? *A flying machine!* Don't you know what that means? . . . The invention which makes it possible for men to travel through the air like birds! The greatest achievement of modern progress!"

"You mean that . . . even here on the mountain tops. . . . I can't *get away?*"

"'Away,' from what? A plane can go *anywhere!*"

Jem Brown clambered weakly to his feet and stumbled to the doorway. In the centre of the clearing a strange, huge, grasshopper-like object stood at rest. It was silent now—but around it everything seemed changed and troubled—and at what moment might it not come to life again, hideously challenging the protesting echoes? How—*how*—could he get rid of it and of its master? Determinedly he faced the aviator: "*I'm all* right . . . have them setbacks real often!" He gasped as a stab of pain brought beads of perspiration to his forehead. With visible effort he stifled a groan. "I've got a map . . . of this distric'; if I give it to you . . . will you go away?"

The aviator shook his head. "I couldn't conscientiously go away and leave you here alone. The remembrance of how you look would haunt me! You're too sick to realize that—you need medical attention."

Jem Brown was driven to desperation: "If you'll go away—an' not come back for a month—I'll give you the deeds to the Guayule . . . an' on 'em I'll mark plain *where the lost lode takes up again!* I've knowed it for forty year . . . but I learnt long since that money don't buy you nothin' but confusion . . . an' I wasn't a-goin' to have folks a-spoilin' this mountain like they spoiled the rest!"

Then, as the aviator stared at him, the old man's eyes filled with tears: "There'll be *plenty* . . . so's you can buy all the things you've ever wanted. . . . But now that I've seen your machine . . . and know that never, any

more . . . will there be a place where I can get away . . . I'd like for to have this last month . . . alone on Guayule, to say good-bye. . . . Then you can take it——"

"You'll do better than *I* expect if you live another week!" The aviator's voice was troubled, perplexed: "I really *can't* leave you; it wouldn't be decent!"

Jem Brown dropped down on the pine branches and stared helplessly in front of him. For a second the narrow window framed a stretch of desert, paved in tawny gold, dotted with sage-brush; through it a camel train wound into the settlement—and his mother was gone.

Followed, then, a shimmer of heat waves above shining metal rails where great locomotives thundered upon their scheduled way. . . . Soon Jenny's place knew her no more.

With a feeble gesture of resignation Jem Brown turned toward the stranger: "I guess . . . maybe . . . this is *my* signal!" he whispered.

Progress had caught up with him.

THE END

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